# Understanding the decision-making processes of young people in a pupil referral unit regarding post-16 education and training

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## Declaration

I, Adam Rossello, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

**Signed**

**Adam Rossello**

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*Thank you.*

## Abstract

For various reasons, young people in Years 10 and 11 often remain in a pupil referral unit (PRU) at a time when they are completing pivotal exams in their educational career. If these do not go well, chances are increased of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), impacting on the individual and society as a whole. Research has established that achievement in, and destinations from, PRUs are poor, and vulnerable young people often receive inadequate careers advice. Where young people are not supported to make realistic choices the evidence suggests that they often disengage with, and drop out of, further education (FE), leading once again to becoming NEET.

This study explored how young people in key stage 4 education at a PRU made decisions about post-16 education and training, and how they were supported to make these decisions. A qualitative research design was adopted with the use of semi-structured interviews at three points in time over three terms to capture the decision-making process over a period of time among seven student participants. Two adult staff participants also took part. Thematic analysis was conducted in order to identify themes that captured the process.

The longitudinal nature of the present research allowed for the iterative process of decision-making to be captured, and highlighted the importance of

young people in a PRU setting receiving support with their decision-making from a familiar adult who is available regularly and with whom the young people have a positive, trusting and comfortable relationship. This support was shown to help young people with the challenges faced throughout the decision-making process such as changing their minds, often through a lack of self-confidence. Implications for educational professionals and educational psychology in practice are considered and directions for future research are discussed.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Chapter overview

The overall purpose of this study was to explore how young people in a pupil referral unit (PRU) made decisions over a period of eight months related to their post-16 education and training, and how they were supported to do this. This chapter provides information regarding the national and local contexts in relation to PRUs and the young people who are likely to attend them, before moving on to an exploration of my interest in this area, as the researcher. There follows a brief description of the structure of the rest of the thesis.

## 1.2 National context and rationale for the research

For a variety of often complex reasons, including school exclusion, missing education and having social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs such as anxiety or school phobia, young people attend alternative provision (Pirrie & Macleod, 2009; Rogers, 2015), the most common in the UK being PRUs (Lawrence, 2011; Meo & Parker, 2004). While the overarching aim of alternative provision is to enable young people to reintegrate into mainstream education, this is problematic for reasons such as the ethos and lack of willingness of mainstream schools to support reintegration, the attitudes of the young people themselves, and the amount of time they are out of mainstream education (Grandison, 2011; Panayiotopoulos & Kerfoot, 2007; Thomas, 2015). Furthermore, rates of reintegration failure are particularly high for older students, and lead to further disengagement (Children's

Commissioner Inquiry [CCI], 2012; Kinder, 2000; Office of the Children's Commissioner [OCC], 2012; Parsons & Howlett, 2000a). The result is that young people in key stage 4 often remain in a PRU at a time when they are completing pivotal exams in their educational career.

This is also the time when young people are making critical decisions about their future education and training. Careers guidance is poor and fragmented in schools (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2009; Department for Education [DfE], 2015b; Ofsted, 2013; Work & Pensions Committee, 2012), and attainment has been found to be consistently poor in PRUs (DfE, 2015c) as are post-16 destinations (DfE, 2015a). Often young people pursue inappropriate qualifications at age 16+ due to poor careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), resulting in disengagement and dropping out (Audit Commission & Ofsted, 1993; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Ofsted, 2013), which often ends with young people becoming not in education, employment or training ([NEET] DfE, 2015b).

Considering the vulnerable cohort of young people who attend PRUs, which totals approximately 7,000 pupils at any given time in England (DfE, 2016a), it is essential to understand more fully how young people in PRUs make decisions and how they can be supported to make positive post-16 educational choices. An understanding of this may help adults to support vulnerable young people to avoid making incorrect choices that can lead to further disengagement with education and training, and the consequences of this.

The current research was carried out in a Greater London borough in which I was working as a trainee educational psychologist. Within the borough there was one PRU that offered alternative provision for secondary-aged pupils, a majority of whom were in key stage 4. It was in this PRU that the research was carried out (herein referred to as 'JR-PRU').

The majority of students at JR-PRU were placed there as a pre-emptive measure to avoid permanent exclusion in the future due to their SEMH needs, or as a result of fixed term exclusions following behaviours related to these needs. Students at JR-PRU were expected to complete four 'core' subjects: Maths, English Language, Science, and Philosophy and Ethics, and could also study up to four additional subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level in a range of areas including Art, Child Development, History, Spanish and Media. Once a week, students were encouraged to take part in extracurricular activities, including sailing, jewellery making and horse riding.

Previous research has identified that decision-making regarding post-16 options is the result of various smaller decisions over time (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001), highlighting the necessity of a longitudinal design to capture the process; however most studies have used a retrospective approach (Mangan, Adnett & Davies, 2001; White, 2007) which has clear limitations, such as bias from inaccurate and selective recall. Furthermore,

there has been no research to date on the process of decision-making regarding 16+ that has focused on a sample from a PRU setting.

The present study, then, forms a unique contribution in the form of a longitudinal case study of key stage 4 students in JR-PRU, focusing on how they made their decisions about moving on after key stage 4 education and how they were supported throughout this process. The findings are intended to compensate for the paucity of current research in the domain from a longitudinal perspective and inform educational psychologists, PRU staff and other practitioners about enabling and supporting factors that helped the young people to make decisions regarding post-16 education and training.

### 1.3 My interest in the area

Prior to beginning the doctoral programme to train as an educational psychologist, I worked as a Pastoral Support Coordinator in a mainstream secondary school in North London. This role included a responsibility for managing and supporting the behaviour of young people in a particular year group. This involved working closely with those who were at risk of permanent exclusion due to their challenging behaviour, and supporting them to remain in mainstream education. A part of my role also consisted of helping these students to organise and attend work experience placements.

My interest in the area was reinforced through conversations with these young people, where it became evident that their challenging behaviour was often a powerful form of communication, and that their intentions were not to

be challenging, but rather they did not appear to know how to communicate their worries, anxieties and concerns in a way that was considered to be 'appropriate'. As a result, some of these students were permanently excluded and attended a PRU, and I heard no more about them. The conversations I had with the students and staff, and my feeling that the students were often misunderstood, sparked my enthusiasm for working with these young people and made it clear that their voices should be listened to.

Training to become an educational psychologist provided further insight into behaviour as a function of the person and their environment (Lewin, 1936), and empowered me to work more closely with vulnerable students at the level of the individual and the organisation. This, along with reflecting on government policy and agendas related to preparing for adulthood (Department for Education and Department for Health [DfEH], 2015) encouraged me to explore the way in which these young people were making decisions related to moving on after key stage 4 education in a PRU, considering the process and the challenges they faced in doing this. The result of my interest was the manifestation of this piece of research.

### 1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter two explores a review of the available literature in areas including careers guidance and the effects and outcomes of young people being NEET, as well as research into decision-making in young people. A description and justification of the methodology used to address the aims of the research follows in Chapter three before the findings of the current study

are presented in Chapters four and five. Finally, Chapter six provides a discussion of the findings complemented by implications for educational professionals and educational psychology in practice, as well as future research possibilities.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that informs the research questions for the current study. The national context is first described in relation to the criticality of this time in the young people's education, along with a brief exploration of the various options that young people face today when they reach 16 years of age and finish key stage 4 schooling. The context of PRUs is then described, relating government policy and research findings to the importance of the current study, before the paucity of effective CEIAG is depicted. The consequence of poor CEIAG is then explored, focusing on the available destination data and those who become NEET, before investigating the research on decision-making. The relevance to educational psychology in practice is then highlighted and this chapter ends with a summary and the research questions that the current study aimed to answer.

## 2.2 Criticality of this time in education

It is difficult to enter the labour market without completing GCSE exams, and those who drop out of secondary education prior to completion are likely to experience obstacles related to finding and keeping a job; limited earning potential; and an increased level of poverty, the consequences of which impact not only at the level of the individual, but also to society as a whole (Lyche, 2010).

Governments internationally in the developed world have recognised the significance of upper secondary education and have introduced various strategies to try to enable young people to remain in education (Rogers, 2015). Whilst many of these strategies operate within a school environment, such as mentoring, for some young people these are not sufficient to meet their complex needs. It is for these young people that many countries operate systems of alternative educational provision that allow students to be presented with a slightly different pathway to help them to remain in education. Within England, the most common form of alternative provision is PRUs (Lawrence, 2011; Meo & Parker, 2004; Thomas, 2015).

Many young people who attend PRUs have had negative educational experiences, struggling in mainstream school for a multiplicity of reasons. These often result in disengagement from education, permanent or fixed-term exclusion from school, and/or persistent absence (White, Martin & Jeffes, 2012). There are various factors associated with young people's disengagement from education, including those at the individual, family and educational institution level, as well as socio-economic and demographic influences (Rogers, 2015). Without being appropriately addressed, these factors can make it extremely challenging for the young people to cope in mainstream school.

Individual factors include, but are not limited to, poor levels of literacy, language and numeracy (DfE, 2012), the level of special educational need

([SEN] Rumberger & Lim, 2009), previous life experiences such as trauma, abuse or violence that may have implications to young people's mental health and ability to learn and function in school (Cole et al., 2005), and low aspirations (Strand & Winston, 2008). Mainwaring and Hallam (2010) explored aspirations with the use of the 'possible selves' construct, and found that young people in PRUs were more likely to have negative possible selves and more negative perceptions of their future prospects (see section 2.8 for a fuller description of this study).

Family factors include family structure such as single parent families (Dale, 2010; Lyche, 2010), the level of family income (Rumberger, 2011) and levels of parental education. For example, parents not having completed post-16 education increases the risk of young people becoming disengaged with education (Dale, 2010; Robinson, Lamb & Walstab, 2010; Traag & van der Velden, 2011).

Regarding factors related to the educational institution, those in which there are positive relationships between students and teacher have been associated with lower drop-out rates (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009). The size of the provision is also important, as is the location and type of institution (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000), with links having been made between large school sizes and the inability for young people to create positive relationships with their teachers (KPMG, 2009).

Further Education (FE) and training is often viewed as a second chance for vulnerable students who have already been disengaged from education, and for some it is seen as a last chance before they drop out of education forever (Ofsted, 2014; Rogers, 2015). Furthermore, transitions can be particularly difficult for students who are disengaged from education and are at risk of school exclusion (Osler, Watling & Busher, 2001), and unbiased and personalised CEIAG plays an important role in young people making the right choices and being supported throughout their transition (Evans et al., 2010). This highlights the importance of ensuring that these young people make realistic and appropriate decisions towards the end of secondary education in relation to post-16 options so as to increase the likelihood of positive engagement and decrease the risk of them becoming a contributing statistic to those who are NEET.

**2.3 National context**

As well as the offer of traditional A-Levels in FE colleges and school sixth forms, FE colleges offer a range of vocational qualifications across a wide curricular spectrum. Some of these are in broad areas including Business, Engineering, Information Technology and Health and Social Care, whilst others lead to specific jobs, such as hairdressing and accounting.

Apprenticeships, which were formally introduced as a post-16 pathway in the UK in 1995 (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001), offer another form of vocational qualification that allows young people to train ‘on the job’, working for an employer whilst studying to gain the necessary qualification to succeed

within their chosen field. This option allows young people to get paid whilst they train and may result in being offered a job by their employer when their training comes to an end.

There have never been so many different education, training and employment options for young people to choose between (Career Development Institute [CDI], 2014), which is likely to be a direct result of the change in legislation that resulted in the participation age rising to 18 (McCrone, Sims & Lynch, 2012). Whilst this provides many varied opportunities for those who do not want to go down the traditional A-Level route, it also increases the complexity of the decision-making process regarding post-16 options, especially for those in a PRU who may have had difficult educational experiences and may leave with low-level qualifications (DfE, 2015c; White et al., 2012). It is important to understand how these young people navigate the range of options and make their final decision.

### 2.4 Alternative Provision and Pupil Referral Units

Alternative provision is defined by the DfE (2013) as:

> "education arranged by local authorities for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour." (p. 3)

This definition encompasses a range of young people including those who are considered vulnerable, display challenging behaviour, would benefit from reengagement following disaffection from education, are too unwell to attend school and those who are at risk of permanent exclusion (DfES, 2005; Ofsted, 2011; Pirrie & Macleod, 2009). As a result, provision includes, amongst others, PRUs, hospital education, home learning, FE colleges and youth services (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 2004). The most common form of alternative provision in England are PRUs (Lawrence, 2011; Meo & Parker, 2004; Thomas, 2015), which have been described as a "particular type of educational setting for young people of compulsory school age who, for different reasons (i.e. challenging behaviour and/or temporary and permanent school exclusion), have been removed from mainstream and special schools" (Meo & Parker, 2004, p.103/4), further highlighting the vulnerability of the students who are likely to attend PRUs.

Within governmental policy and official statistical information, alternative provision and PRUs are collapsed into one group as if they are synonymous. This suggests that the two populations are considered to be homogeneous, which they are not; a PRU is one form of alternative provision. It is important to take care to distinguish between the different types of alternative provision, such as PRUs; hospital learning; and home learning, and acknowledge that the current research is focusing on a PRU context.

The aim of a PRU is to provide education for children and young people for a short time before attempting reintegration into mainstream education (Lawrence, 2011). This, however, is problematic due to the challenge of reintegrating those in key stage 4 education (Parsons & Howlett, 200b). Furthermore, PRUs often have a limited curriculum, their offer often fails to challenge students (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2014), and it has been suggested that staff focus more on the emotional wellbeing of students than their educational attainment, impacting on expectations and success criteria (Ofsted, 2011; Ofsted, 2016; te Riele, 2014). Concerns have often been raised about the quality of education in alternative provisions and PRUs (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2015c; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Ofsted, 1995; Ofsted, 2016; Taylor, 2012), and it has been asserted that PRUs are not designed to be long-term placements (Thomas, 2015).

However, for a variety of reasons including high rates of reintegration failure, especially for older students, and reluctance amongst some mainstream schools to support reintegration, this is often not the case, resulting in many young people in Years 10 and 11 remaining in a PRU when they are approaching the time of pivotal exams and are having to make critical decisions about their future training or education (OCC, 2012; Panayiotopoulos & Kerfoot, 2007; Parsons & Howlett, 2000b; Wilkin, Gulliver & Kinder, 2005). Taking this into consideration, it is vital for PRUs to consider how they support their students with the transition to post-16 life, and research into this would be valuable.

## 2.5 Careers guidance

Due to the large number of post-16 options available, it is now considerably more challenging for young people to be knowledgeable about and understand the process by which to decide on and apply for courses and apprenticeships in comparison to previous generations, making this a time when it has never been more important for young people to receive high quality CEIAG (CDI, 2014). There is also a clear government agenda related to providing appropriate and impartial CEIAG (Ofsted, 2015), although challenges include a lack of extra funding for schools to do this (McCrone et al., 2012).

In an attempt to ensure that all young people are prepared for life in modern Britain after leaving key stage 4 education, the DfE (2015b) published statutory guidance regarding careers advice and inspiration in schools. Careers guidance is defined within this document as "a coherent programme of activities that inform, inspire and motivate young people, preparing them for work and helping them to understand where different education and training choices could take them in the future" (p. 3). This definition incorporates classroom and extra-curricular activities aimed at building character, such as resilience, in order to succeed within education and employment. Additionally, the DfE guidance makes it clear that excellent independent and impartial CEIAG is also vital to ensure that young people are well-informed when making decisions about post-16 pathways, and asserts that modern guidance is not solely about advice, but must also inspire young people in relation to next steps (DfE, 2015b). The CDI defines

‘independent’ as “being from a source external to the school” and ‘impartial’ as “showing no bias towards a particular education, training or work option” (2014, p.5). The DfE states that schools can provide careers advice and guidance to their pupils by using resources within their institutions; however it then goes on to state that this is not sufficient to meet the statutory duty and must be combined with independent external providers (DfE, 2015b).

CEIAG, however, is described as patchy and inadequate (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2015b; Ofsted, 2013), and evidence suggests that few young people find it helpful (Dyke et al., 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999). Indeed, Ofsted (2013) declared that as few as one in five schools were providing effective careers guidance to young people in Years 9 to 11, and research has found that, whilst careers advisers have been described as personable and friendly, individual careers guidance does not advance decision-making, and neither does it help students to feel better prepared to make the decisions or to transition into post-16 education (Kidd & Wardman, 1999). Careers advisers were at times negatively evaluated for merely responding to the indicated aims, without challenging the young people or finding out more about reasons for their preferences (Kidd & Wardman, 1999).

Furthermore, the Work and Pensions Committee (2012) explained that the patchiness of CEIAG has become worse and more widespread since it has been shared among various providers including schools and LAs. Additionally, whilst our knowledge of CEIAG in PRUs is limited, we know that young people with identified SEN and those at risk of becoming NEET

receive more careers advice than others; however in practice they tend to receive more of the same guidance rather than a personalised approach (McCrone & Filmer-Sankey, 2012). This means that vulnerable young people who are already at risk of becoming NEET lack good quality careers guidance, thus compounding the risk. The implication of this, along with the poor CEIAG in secondary schools, is inappropriate decision-making, unsuccessful transitions and an increased likelihood of young people dropping out at 16+, further increasing the likelihood of becoming NEET (DfE, 2015b; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; McCrone & Filmer-Sankey, 2012; Martinez & Munday, 1998; Payne, 1995).

Various organisations have made suggestions about how good quality careers guidance should be provided. The DfE (2015b) suggests principles for good practice, which include inspiring young people through the input of motivational speakers, careers fairs, coaches/mentors, visits to colleges, building strong links with employers, offering supportive work experience options, and informing pupils about financial support, while using all available information to identify vulnerable young people. The CDI suggests that good CEIAG is related to activities that schools and PRUs already engage in with students, such as progress reviews, monitoring academic progress and mentoring. It is suggested that these activities should help school staff to support students' curiosity about their futures and should help to identify those who may benefit from further, more specialist, support (CDI, 2014).

It is important for young people to have opportunities to access impartial and personalised CEIAG to enable them to make the right decisions and be supported throughout their transitions (Evans et al., 2010). High quality CEIAG can decrease the chances that young people will become disaffected with their decision and in turn decrease the likelihood that they will drop out (McCrone & Filmer-Sankey, 2012). Well-timed and appropriate CEIAG can help young people to find suitable options and reduce the likelihood of enrolling onto a course that was not what they had expected (Rogers, 2015; Simm, Page & Miller, 2007).

Given the issues raised, it seems important to study a PRU environment to make sense of how more vulnerable young people, who are arguably less likely to make appropriate decisions, are supported to make important choices related to post-16. The DfE (2015b) suggests that the effectiveness of CEIAG should be measured by considering the attainment of pupils as well as their destinations, and specifies that successful guidance will be reflected in increased numbers of young people progressing to apprenticeships and FE colleges. Previous data from JR-PRU suggests that the majority of their students do progress to apprenticeships and FE colleges, making it an appropriate setting in which to complete such research.

### 2.6 Destinations

The vast majority of young people who attend state-funded mainstream schools in the UK have a high chance of a successful transition to an

education or employment/training setting, with up to 92% of young people successfully transitioning to a 'sustained' destination (DfE, 2014b). The DfE has defined the term 'sustained' as attending for the first two terms of the following academic year. For the purpose of the current research, this will be referred to as a 'successful destination'.

The destinations of young people in key stage 4 in alternative provision and PRUs, however are extremely poor in comparison, reaching as low as 50% in 2010/2011 (DfE, 2014b) and not improving much since then (DfE, 2015a). Furthermore, the percentage of young people who became NEET following completing key stage 4 education in alternative provision and PRUs was high, at between 18% and 21% compared with 3% of those from mainstream schools (DfE, 2014b; DfE, 2015a). This is a significant finding, especially when considered in relation to research on school exclusion, links of which have been shown with the likelihood of becoming NEET (Pring et al., 2009); becoming involved with crime, social exclusion, drug and alcohol misuse; and greater vulnerability to experiencing mental health problems (Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson & Neumark-Sztainerm, 2007).

### 2.7 Young people who are NEET, and their outcomes

The most recent NEET data show that as of December 2015, 6.6% of 16-18 year-olds were recorded as NEET in England, equaling 121,000 young people (DfE, 2016b). The consequences of being NEET have been shown at the level of the individual, including links to drug and alcohol abuse, poor relationships and engaging with crime (Coles, Hutton, Bradshaw, Craig,

Godfrey & Johnson, 2002; Eurofound, 2012), and at the societal level, including related costs to tax, the healthcare system, benefits and crime (Rogers, 2015). Coles et al. (2010) identified several forms of later disadvantage as a result of being NEET between the ages of 16-18, which included future periods of unemployment after the age of 18, teenage pregnancy, youth offending, homelessness and earlier death, making the negative impacts and importance of avoiding becoming NEET clear.

Whilst the government is succeeding at ensuring that the number of young people NEET is decreasing on the whole, the majority of the decrease has occurred in the 19 to 24 age range, whilst the data relating to the 16-18 population have remained more stable (DfE & Department for Buisness, Innovation and Skills [DfBIS], 2016). This highlights the severity of the issue within this age-range.

It is vital for all provisions which educate young people to do whatever possible to avoid the risk of their students becoming NEET in the future, especially alternative provisions such as PRUs, due to the vulnerability of their students. A way of helping such students could be with the use of targeted CEIAG to help them make appropriate decisions, along with experiences that support the development of their self-esteem and confidence (Rogers, 2015).

## 2.8 Decision-making

Although there has been a multitude of research into judgment and decision-making (JDM) in adolescence, the vast majority of this has been in regard to risky decision-making (e.g. Vorobyev, Kwon, Moe, Parkkola & Hämäläinen, 2015), sexual health (e.g. Farris, Akers, Downs & Forbes, 2013), youth offending (e.g. Nagel, Guarnera & Reppucci, 2016) and medical decisions (e.g. Ruggeri, Gummerum & Hanoch, 2014). Whilst the nature of these areas of JDM differ considerably from the area in which this thesis is concerned, and so detailed descriptions have been omitted from this literature review, findings suggest that decision-making is suboptimal in adolescence (Arnett, 1999; Casey, Getz & Galvan, 2008; Steinberg et al., 2008). The goal of this part of the literature review is to consider literature and research related to young people's decision-making related to their future education, training and career, and research that is linked to this. Consequently, literature regarding decision-making in adolescence, decision-making in general, and decision-making that may invoke emotional responses, such as stress and anxiety, will be the main focus.

Decision-making is described as "using information to guide behavior among multiple courses of action" (Wilke & Todd, 2012, p. 3). Interestingly, adolescence being the time when there is a requirement to learn and make important decisions related to young people's futures has been described as paradoxical, with this time in development being linked to young people most wanting to forget, act impulsively and avoid reflection (Coren, 1997; Youell, 2006). This is difficult, as this is a time when young people "face many

important decisions, often for the first time in their lives" (Bruine de Bruin, 2012, p. 85), further reinforcing the criticality of this point in young people's lives and of the decision-making processes themselves.

Furthermore, many psychologists have described the unstable self-concept in adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1996; Rutter & Rutter, 1992), most famously Erikson, who believed that the transition to adulthood is difficult, especially due to what he termed 'role confusion', which encompasses the stage of adolescence from age 13 to 19 (Erikson, 1968). Stevens (1983) describes role confusion as an unwillingness to commit, which can make deciding on a career path challenging as the young people are being asked to commit before their individual identity roles have fully formed.

Stevens (1983) also explains that society usually allows young people the time to 'find themselves'; a state named by Erikson as the 'psychosocial moratorium'. The psychosocial moratorium can be described as the coming together of the correct conditions to enable enough time and space for the young person to explore their possibilities to encourage a more firm sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). It would appear that an aim of a PRU is to provide this psychosocial moratorium for young people, however research suggests that young people in a PRU can often feel vulnerable and are more likely to have bleak expectations regarding their future (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010), which is likely to make it even more challenging for these young people to aspire to adopt a role or secure an identity.

Mainwaring and Hallam (2010) investigated aspirations using the construct of possible selves. Possible selves are concerned with conceptions of the self that someone believes they may become in the near and distant future (Markus & Nurius, 1987). The focus of Mainwaring and Hallam's (2010) research was 25 students in Year 11; 16 of these students were attending a PRU, and the other nine were in a mainstream setting. The researchers interviewed the sample to explore their positive, negative and impossible selves, asking questions about how they saw themselves in the future such as "What would you least like to happen to you in the future?" (p. 161; an example of a question asked to explore the participants' negative possible selves) and "Is there anything that you feel is impossible for you?" (p. 162; an example of a question asked regarding participants' impossible selves).

Findings showed that participants from the mainstream school were more likely to suggest positive possible selves than those from the PRU; participants from the PRU also provided a large number of negative possible selves, the worry and fear for which was described by the researchers as 'considerable'; and participants from the PRU also generated many answers to the question designed to elicit impossible selves, which was in stark contrast to the mainstream sample, all of whom felt that nothing was impossible if they put in enough effort. In summary, their findings showed that overall the students at the PRU were less likely to identify with positive future selves and more likely to identify with negative or impossible selves (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010). These findings suggest that many young people who attend PRUs may feel disenfranchised due to negative

perceptions of themselves and what they can achieve in the future and may link to the poor attainment of young people in PRUs (Michael & Frederickson, 2013). Furthermore, as alluded to above, if young people who attend PRUs have bleak expectations regarding their future, they are likely to find it even more challenging to make appropriate decisions due to the difficulty of viewing themselves in a particular role or adopting a particular identity being compounded. This is likely to have a negative impact on these young people pursuing long-term goals, resulting in it being difficult to appropriately plan and make decisions related to their future.

Bruine de Bruin (2012) explains the importance of assessing the decision-making competence of adolescents, due to the likelihood of this age group feeling overwhelmed with having to make decisions that are too challenging for them. Conversely, the researchers also assert that if young people's decision-making capabilities are underestimated, they may lack the autonomy and independence that they crave and will likely be unprepared to make decisions in later life (Bruine de Bruin, 2012).

Decision-making is a complex skill which is likely to depend on several capacities, including the ability to control emotional responses (van Duijvenvoorde, Jansen, Visser & Huizenga, 2010). It is fair to say that being asked to make decisions about what to do after leaving a nurturing environment after key stage 4 education is likely to invoke a great deal of emotional responses, especially considering the fact that young people in a PRU are likely to have had negative experiences of, and be disengaged

from, education (White, Martin & Jeffes, 2012) and have low aspirations (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; Strand & Winston, 2008). Steinberg (2007) asserts that whilst adolescent reasoning skills are considered to be relatively mature, their capacity to manage emotional responses is still considered immature at this developmental time, resulting in an 'emotional overshoot' due to an imbalance in the brain of the adolescent between emotional responding and control processes (Casey, Getz & Galvan, 2008). This suggests that adolescents' capacity to make sensible and appropriate decisions is impaired in emotionally arousing situations at this time in their lives.

We know that key stage 4 education, especially Year 11, is a stressful time for young people; not only due to having to make important decisions about their futures, but also due to having to complete critical exams for which many experience anxiety (Von Der Embse, Barterian & Segool, 2013). Decision-making whilst having to control emotional responses by adolescents was explored by van Duijvenvoorde, Jansen, Visser and Huizenga (2010), who administered two tasks to their sample of 107 adolescents aged between 13 and 15. One task was described as an 'affective' task, which was a task in which decisions would result in apparent emotionally significant consequences (a hungry donkey would either be provided with more or less apples to eat). The other task was labelled a 'cognitive' task, in which decisions did not result in consequences that were emotionally significant. Findings indicated that participants performed sub-optimally in the affective task when compared with the cognitive task,

adopting a one-dimensional decision rule that focused on options where there was not a loss in the number of apples fed to the donkey. Whilst the study by van Duijvenvoorde, Jansen, Visser and Huizenga (2010) has limitations when considering the results in relation to the current research, such as a lack of ecological validity (the affective task consisted of a computer programme), it provides some evidence that adolescents' capacity to make decisions is impaired in emotionally arousing situations, which has implications for making important decisions at this time in their lives.

Some research has resulted in the creation of models of judgment and decision-making ([JDM] Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002; Bruine de Bruin, 2012; White, 2007), such as Brandtstädter & Rothermund (2002) who argue that through assimilation and accommodation young people adjust their goals and aspiration levels to given situational constraints.

White (2007) coined a multi-stage approach supported by three types of choice ranging from 'inclusive', which are those made in order to reach a desired outcome, 'exclusive', which are those made to avoid a particular outcome, and 'default', which are those influenced by others' expectations. Brandtstädter and Rothermund (2002) introduced the model of assimilative and accommodative coping, which suggests that through assimilation and accommodation, young people adjust their goals and aspiration levels to given situational constraints, and that a balance must be struck for adaptive development to occur.

The model by Brandtstädter & Rothermund (2002) also states, however, that if a person has a goal that is perceived to be closely connected to their identity, they are less likely to adjust it in the face of barriers, and tend to continue to pursue their goal, even when there are clear signs that it may not be realistic, suggesting that decision-making processes may be more flexible than often implied in various research and models posited. Furthermore, such models have been criticised due to decision-making being a complex process that cannot be captured by any one model (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999).

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) asserted that such models tend to make two incorrect assumptions. The first is that a choice will be decided upon only after carefully evaluating each appropriate option and choosing the one that will secure meeting their goal; and the second is that people always consider the advantages and disadvantages of making each possible decision, showing that models tend to be too reductionist in nature (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). They concluded that there is little evidence that suggests people end up with the most rational or optimum solution.

Importantly, research has shown that decision-making is a process that takes place over time (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). A great deal of work has explored young people's decision-making processes; however, frequently it has asked them to comment retrospectively (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Mangan, Adnett & Davies, 2001; White, 2007), resulting in a reliance on participants' memories regarding the process some

time after having experienced it. Much research has also had a focus on mainstream schools, and has often recruited samples of high achieving children (Dyke, Foskett & Maringe, 2008; Hemsley-Brown, 1999; White, 2007), resulting in the lack of inclusion of vulnerable young people who are not in mainstream education. Similarly, some research has focused on whether participants chose to continue into their school's sixth form (Foskett et al., 2008; Mangan et al., 2001), an option not available to the participants in this study. The understanding of decision-making by young people in these contexts cannot be transferred to vulnerable young people who have been excluded from school. It is important, therefore, to research the decision-making processes of these more vulnerable young people, especially those who are out of mainstream education, such as those in PRUs.

Whilst there is an understanding that decision-making is complex, research has shown that it is highly influenced by the contexts from which students operate, including factors such as the culture and ethos of the institution (Foskett et al., 2008; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999). Whilst dated, an interesting longitudinal example was carried out by Hemsley-Brown (1999) regarding young people's priorities in choosing FE colleges and how well informed their decisions were. Twenty-five students were interviewed five times over an 18-month period covering their decision-making between Year 10 and Year 12.

In the study by Hemsley-Brown (1999), student decision-making was found to be complex, highly influenced by the contexts, and only partly influenced by rationality but also by feelings and emotions, in contrast to models of rationality posited (Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002; Bruine de Bruin, 2012; White, 2007). The finding related to the influence of context highlights the importance of completing research within other specific settings in order to explore this further. Other interesting findings included the importance of experiential activities, such as visiting prospective institutions, which has since been supported by other research (Dyke et al., 2008; Mangan et al., 2001). This has implications for key stage 4 institutions, as providing experiential activities can be organised early on in the students' key stage 4 careers to support their decision-making processes, and this has been recommended by the DfE (2015b). Another finding by Hemsley-Brown (1999) was that decisions are made in a social and cultural environment, and so are influenced by parents/carers and friends (see also Dietrich, Parker & Salmela-Aro, 2012; Dyke et al., 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Mangan et al., 2001; Tynkkynen, Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2010), further highlighting the significance of the multiple contexts in which young people are involved.

Limitations of the study by Hemsley-Brown (1999) include having used only a mainstream sample. Given the importance placed on context this reinforces a need to research the decision-making processes of young people in various settings, including PRUs. Furthermore, much has changed in government policy since 1999, including a rise in the participation age of compulsory education to 18, which has likely had an impact on decision-

making for this age group, highlighting the need for contemporary research in this area.

Although there have been other studies that explore how students make decisions in FE and school settings, there are none that have focused on the context of a PRU.

To summarise, literature shows that decision-making is a process that takes place over time, however the majority of research does not take this into account and studies have focused on mainstream education, omitting the more vulnerable students from their samples. Considering the importance of context that has been shown in the decision-making process, and the increased likelihood of young people who attend PRUs experiencing unsuccessful destinations following key stage 4 education, it seems clear that longitudinal research should take place in a PRU regarding how young people who attend in key stage 4 make decisions about their future education, and how they are supported to do this. It is vital to obtain the views of the young people in completing such research (Allan, 2011; DfEH, 2015; Knipe, Reynolds & Milner, 2007; Wise & Upton, 1998), especially in light of the view that they may have a great deal to say, but appear not to have had much opportunity to say it (Munn & Lloyd, 2005; Wise & Upton, 1998).

## 2.9 Relevance to educational psychology practice

Educational psychologists regularly work in and with PRUs, completing work drawing on various psychological models, including personal construct psychology (PCP), solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) and systemic theory (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Cullen & Raomoutar, 2003). For example, with the use of such approaches, Cullen and Monroe (2010) worked with the senior leadership team of a PRU to create an effecitve intervention, which in this case revolved around a sporting activity, to engage young people with learning and help foster relationships between staff and students.

Cullen and Monroe (2010) explain that educational psychologists are equipped with various relevant skills to support practice in PRUs, including applied psychology research skills; experience of professional practice in complex educational and community contexts with various agencies; and knowledge and understanding of complex casework. They conclude that educational psychologists have a great deal to offer at the levels of the individual, group and organisation within a PRU setting.

Educational psychologists frequently draw upon a wide field of theoretical frameworks, including SFBT (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Cullen & Raomoutar, 2003). SFBT is concerned with the philosophical theory around the nature of knowledge, the way reality is constructed, and the importance and creative potential of language (George, Iveson & Ratner, 1999). The use of a solution-focused approach is powerful in educational psychology practice with adults and young people in various settings (McGlone, 2001; Stearn &

Moore, 2001; Wagner & Gillies, 2001). Adopting a solution-focused approach, such as with the use of scaling, when asking questions, can obtain the interviewee's views of their current situation, what they hope for in the future, and how they might be able to achieve these goals (Redpath & Harker, 1999; Wagner & Gillies, 2001; Young & Holdorf, 2003), and so can be helpful when thinking about making decisions and planning for the future.

Following the recognition of the increased mental health needs of children and young people (Atkinson, Corban & Templeton, 2011; Willis & Jones, 2014; World Health Organisation [WHO], 2004), it has never been more appropriate to ensure that educational psychologists are consistently working with staff and young people in PRUs, supporting their mental health and academic needs. Furthermore, educational psychologists receive training within the field of organisational psychology and are able to work with the senior leadership teams of schools and alternative provisions to promote change at the level of the organisation, meaning that educational psychologists are well placed to help staff in PRUs to consider how they support their students to make decisions about post-16 education and training.

Educational psychologist involvement is recommended by, and continues to relate to, government policy (e.g. DfES, 2015), and EP involvement in PRUs can also strongly relate to government initiatives (Cullen & Monroe, 2010). The updated SEND Code of Practice shows a clear governmental agenda related to preparing young people for adulthood (DfES, 2015), and as such

the involvement of educational psychologists with young people over the age of 16 is likely to continue to increase, the training for which has been introduced into educational psychologist training programmes (Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang & Wright, 2015).

Following these changes in legislation, the age range in reference to providing support for young people with SEN has been extended to 25 (Children and Families Act, 2014; DfES, 2015). This ensures that educational psychologists regularly work with young people in a range of settings. This particular thesis focuses on decision-making among a cohort of young people in a PRU, since it is important for vulnerable young people to be supported to make appropriate decisions that are likely to lead to successful outcomes, and there is every sense that educational psychologists have the skills to do this (Cullen & Monroe, 2010). Furthermore, it is vital for EPs and frontline professionals to have an understanding of how decisions are made, and be aware of how they can provide effective support. For educational psychologists this support includes helping the young people themselves, the frontline professionals, and senior leadership teams from a systemic and organisational perspective (Frederickson & Cline, 2002).

Educational psychologists are likely to become more involved with young people in various post-16 settings, and are likely to be in a position to support schools and alternative provisions to evaluate their careers guidance services due to their systemic role within schools. Furthermore, Daniels et

al. (2003) emphasise the importance of greater educational psychologist involvement in processes related to exclusion, with Parsons (2009) showing that in LAs where young people cannot be excluded without input from an educational psychologist, the exclusion rates are low. It can be argued that this is due to the insight educational psychologists provide into ways of meeting the needs of young people and an ability to support the tailoring of the learning environment to their specific needs. These transferrable skills can and should be used in relation to supporting schools and alternative provisions to evaluate and improve their careers guidance services.

### 2.10 Summary

It is evident that many young people who attend PRUs have had negative educational experiences and are often disengaged from education for a variety of often-complex reasons (Cole et al., 2005; Dale, 2010; DfE, 2012; KPMG, 2009; Lyche, 2010; Robinson, Lamb & Walstab, 2010; Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009; Rogers, 2015; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2009; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Strand & Winston, 2008; Traag & van der Velden, 2011; White, Martin & Jeffes, 2012). It is also clear that the quality of education in PRUs is often concerning, as are the outcomes for young people who attend (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2015c; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Ofsted, 1995; Ofsted, 2016; Taylor, 2012). We know that, nationwide, CEIAG is of poor quality and most young people do not find it helpful (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2015b; Dyke et al., 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Ofsted, 2013), the number of successful destinations from PRUs are low (DfE, 2014b; DfE,

2015a), often resulting in many young people making inappropriate decisions, often leading to becoming NEET (DfE, 2014b; DfE, 2015a).

Additionally, transitions are challenging for students who are disengaged from education (Osler, Watling & Busher, 2001), and there are concerns about young people in PRUs suffering from low self-esteem and low self-concept, as well as having low future aspirations (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1996; Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010; Rutter & Rutter, 1992). Furthermore, decision-making is difficult, and is further compounded by the developmental stage of adolescence (Arnett, 1999; Casey, Getz & Galvan, 2008; Coren, 1997; Steinberg et al., 2008; Youell, 2006).

Decision-making has been described as a process that takes place over time (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001), and the importance and influence of context has been shown (Foskett et al., 2008; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999). However, the majority of research in the area of decision-making regarding choices related to education have adopted a retrospective approach (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Mangan, Adnett & Davies, 2001; White, 2007) and have focused on mainstream schools (Dyke, Foskett & Maringe, 2008; Hemsley-Brown, 1999; White, 2007). It is apparent that our knowledge of how the decision-making process works in PRUs is lacking, which the current research has sought to address.

## 2.11 Conclusion and research questions

Many young people remain in PRUs throughout their key stage 4 education during a time when they are having to complete challenging and important exams and make key decisions regarding their future. Official data and research shows that the quality of education received in PRUs on the whole is poor (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2015c; Michael & Frederickson, 2013; Ofsted, 1995; Ofsted, 2016; Taylor, 2012), and CEIAG in the UK is inadequate and ineffective (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2015b; Ofsted, 2013). The result is often inappropriate decisions being made, leading to unsuccessful transitions and an increased likelihood of young people dropping out at 16+ and becoming NEET (DfE, 2015b; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; McCrone & Filmer-Sankey, 2012; Martinez & Munday, 1998; Payne, 1995), which culminates in a variety of negative consequences for individuals and society as a whole (Coles, Hutton, Bradshaw, Craig, Godfrey & Johnson, 2002; Eurofound, 2012; Rogers, 2015).

There is a lack of longitudinal research on *how* young people make decisions related to post-16 options, especially within the context of a PRU, which is important considering research showing that young people who attend PRUs are more likely to have bleak expectations about their futures (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010). Additionally, empirical research focusing on those that go into vocational training, which PRU students are likely to do, is also lacking (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006).

Therefore, the current study seeks to address the lack of research concerning the views and self-reported experiences of young people who are attending a PRU regarding their decision-making processes and how they are supported to make decisions related to post-16 choices. A longitudinal approach has been adopted for the current study as evidence from the literature indicates that such decisions are the manifestations of various smaller decisions that gradually commit one to a final choice, and so it is assumed that these decisions are not constant or predictable but rather develop over time.

To this end, the following research questions have been postulated:

1. How do young people at a PRU make decisions about moving on after key stage 4 education?
2. What contextual factors support these young people to make decisions that are likely to be successful, allowing them to continue to post-16 education?

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter describes the methodology used to complete the current research. It begins by describing the epistemological and ontological considerations adopted before providing some information regarding the local context in which the research took place. Focus is then given to ethical considerations that were pivotal in the design of this research. The design of the research is then described, followed by details regarding the participants who took part. The materials used are explored, and the research procedure is described, before moving on to how the data were analysed. Finally, thought is given to my role as the researcher.

## 3.2 Epistemological and ontological framework

Epistemology is concerned with the nature and theory of knowledge (Audi, 2010) and how the reality that was being investigated was understood by me, as the researcher (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaung, 2001). Ontology relates to the philosophical nature and questioning of reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

The epistemological approach adopted for the current study was one of phenomenology. This position supports an understanding of phenomena as they are presented by participants (Willig, 2001). The ontological position adopted was social constructionism, whereby there was an understanding

that meaning does not simply exist, but is constructed through interaction and experiences (Burr, 2003). This approach highlights participants' experiences as they are lived within social situations (Schwandt, 2007), and acknowledges that phenomena can be understood in more than one way, depending on who is interpreting (Willig, 2001).

These epistemological and ontological positions were deemed appropriate for several reasons. Firstly, as previous literature has stressed that decision-making is a process that takes place over time (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001), it was necessary to allow for an understanding of the participants' meaning making during their individual processes, all of which were expected to be distinct. Secondly, the educational psychology training course encourages the use of such views in order to understand and enable me to help clients, meaning that the views sit comfortably with me and are appropriate when working with young people and adults.

I adopt a social constructionist stance within my practice using approaches derived from PCP, which assumes that people continuously make meaning of their individual world (Wagner & Gillies, 2001) and allows a deeper understanding; symbolic interactionism, which adds a social dimension to how we make meaning (Wagner & Gillies, 2001); and solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT), which encourages clients to use resources that they know, understand and have access to in order to facilitate positive change. The social constructionist stance enables an understanding of participants that is closer to their worldview, and less biased by the way we, as researchers, see

the world. Due to the nature of a PRU and a paucity of longitudinal research in the area, I judged that this would allow for an appropriate understanding of the student voice provided by the participants, permitting an unassuming stance on the understanding of the social experiences of others.

### 3.3 PRU setting

The present research took place in JR-PRU, which is located in an affluent Greater London borough in which I was working as a trainee educational psychologist. Local data at the time showed that the borough had a population of approximately 170,000 people, 27% of whom were black and minority ethnic, which was low when compared to Outer and Inner London statistics, which were at approximately 40%, but higher than the national average (England) of 14.6% (London Datastore, 2016). A little under 20% of the population were aged under 16, and just under 4% of 16-18 year-olds were recorded NEET, which was slightly higher than the Outer London, Inner London and national situation (England), which was 3.4% at the time (London Datastore, 2016). Short of 70% of young people in the borough achieved five or more A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent including English and Maths in the academic year 2013/14 (London Datastore, 2016).

At the time in which the current research took place, JR-PRU had the capacity to provide 74 places for students aged between 11 and 16, although only 54 were being utilised. The principal referral route was the awareness of a young person raised at a monthly panel meeting within the borough that was attended by the lead exclusions officer, the head teacher of JR-PRU,

and a member of the senior leadership team from all secondary schools in the borough. The school representative presented a student's case over a series of these meetings, reporting on interventions and progress, and a decision was made collaboratively regarding whether JR-PRU was an appropriate setting.

Due to JR-PRU drawing on the resources and services of other provisions in the local area, including FE colleges and specialist teachers from local schools, a wide curriculum was offered. Students who attended JR-PRU were expected to complete what were considered to be four core subjects at GCSE level: Maths, English Language, Science, and Philosophy and Ethics. They could also choose up to another four additional subjects in a range of areas including Art, Child Develoipment, History, Spanish and Media Studies. Each week, students were also encouraged to take part in activities that formed part of JR-PRU's wider curriculum, including sailing, jewellery making and horse-riding.

JR-PRU was awarded with a 'good' rating following their most recent Ofsted inspection. Limitations noted by the Ofsted Inspector included the students not being challenged to achieve more, which has been identified as a national problem (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2014). Strengths were reported to include the achievement of students who attended, the speed at which students made progress following the beginning of their placement, and positive relationships were evident between pupils and their peers as well as with the staff. Furthermore, on the basis of data from JR-PRU, it appeared

that there had been some positive outcomes in relation to destinations following key stage 4 education, which was in contrast to national destination data related to PRUs (DfE, 2014b; DfE, 2015a; DfE, 2016a). Table 1 shows JR-PRU's destination data for academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 (no previous historical data were available due to this not being kept by a previous head teacher). Percentages are shown with the number of students these relate to in brackets.

**Table 1: JR-PRU destination data**

| **Type of Institution** | **2013/14** | **2014/15** |
|---|---|---|
| FE College | 60% (12) | 45% (10) |
| Apprenticeship | 15% (3) | 10% (2) |
| Pre-apprenticeship* | 15% (3) | 35% (8) |
| **Total sustained education/ employment/ training** | **90% (18)** | **90% (20)** |
| Other** | 10% (2) | 5% (1) |
| Unknown | 0% (0) | 5% (1) |

* Course run by the Adult Education department, funded by the LA, targeting young people who did not get the necessary GCSE results to progress onto FE/apprenticeship or who were not considered emotionally ready to move on, as judged by the students themselves, their parents/carers and/or PRU staff.

** JR-PRU's records show that in 2013/14 one young person moved abroad and one was working with their family following leaving the PRU. In 2014/15

one young person became a new parent and so was unable to engage in education or training at that time.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations

Due to the nature of the sample, all decisions made regarding the design of the current research were grounded within ethical considerations, including ensuring that participants, especially students, clearly understood the research and their role within this, as well as ensuring that they felt comfortable to withdraw from the study at any time. These decisions that were heavily influenced by ethical considerations were pivotal to how the research was carried out.

The UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee approved the proposal for the current study in line with the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2009). Whilst a comprehensive list and description of ethical considerations were considered on the Ethical Approval Form, several pertinent ones that informed the design and development of the research are described here.

#### *3.4.1 Informed consent and right to withdraw*

Due to the nature of the student participants' vulnerabilities, it was important that their understanding of the Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix 5) was checked before they were asked to provide their written consent. This included information regarding their right

to withdraw from the research at any point before, during or upon completion of the interviews, for whatever reason, without any consequences.

It was felt necessary for this to be completed sensitively, and so whilst I read the Participant Information Sheet and consent form to each participant and provided opportunities for them to ask me questions about the research during and after this had taken place, I also explained that if, after I had left, they realised there was something they were unsure of or had any other questions, they could speak to the head teacher of JR-PRU, with whom they were all very familiar and felt comfortable with. It was felt that this would be sufficient as the head teacher assured me that they would be honest with her if they were not with me at this stage of the research process. The student information sheet was given to the participants for them to keep for their records, however they were also encouraged to speak to their parents/carers if they were unsure about anything.

The participants' right to withdraw was fulfilled during the research by reminding each young person at the beginning and end of each interview that they were entitled to withdraw at anytime without any consequences. At the beginning of each interview it was also explained to them that they were not obliged to answer a question if they did not want to or feel comfortable doing so, and that if they would prefer not to answer a question they could either vocalise this or show me a 'thumbs down' to signal this and prompt me to move on. I also explained that if they would like to stop an interview they could tell me and it would be stopped with no questions asked as to why.

When asked whether they understood this, they each signaled that they did. During all interviews, body language was monitored to check for any signs of discomfort, however none were witnessed.

Whilst issues related to informed consent and the right to withdraw were explained to the adult participants as well as being included in the Staff Information Sheet and Consent Form, they were not offered the 'thumbs down' option, however it was explained to them that they could abstain from answering any questions they did not want to answer, and could end the interview at any time.

*3.4.2 Confidentiality/anonymity*

All characteristics of each participant and any other people mentioned were changed or censored during the transcription process, honouring anonymity. Confidentiality was discussed with participants, explaining that so long as I was not concerned about their safety or the safety of others, nothing they said to me would be repeated to their parents or staff within JR-PRU. This was respected, and only myself and my supervisors had access to the audio and electronically-written versions of interview transcripts, which was agreed to when consent forms were signed.

**3.5 Research design**

The intention of this research was to draw on young people's perceptions and experiences. To this end, a qualitative approach to data collection was considered most appropriate due to a qualitative methodology typically

involving “detailed exploration of the interwoven aspects of the topics or processes studied” (Yardley, 2000, p. 215), which complemented the phenomenology epistemological stance adopted. Additionally, Robson (2011) explains that qualitative, or ‘flexible’ designs often consist of various characteristics, the most prominent for this research being an exploration of multiple realities obtained by the views of participants, which matched the social constructionist ontology (Burr, 2003). A qualitative study was judged to be most appropriate therefore, in order to understand the participants’ experiences over time.

### *3.5.1 Longitudinal case study design*

There were various options when considering the design of the current study. Firstly, more than one PRU could have been focused on to try to gain an understanding of young people across several PRUs. However, time constraints would have implicated this design, forcing the exploration of participants’ experiences to be captured retrospectively as much of the previous research has already done, relying on participants’ memories of their experiences (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Mangan, Adnett & Davies, 2001; White, 2007). Secondly, in order to capture a large sample of PRU students, the design could have incorporated a questionnaire to be sent to a large number of students in many PRUs, however the questions asked would likely have proven difficult to answer in this format, and once again the findings would not have moved forward our understanding of the *processes* by which young people make decisions over

time. Furthermore, this option would not have been consistent with my epistemological and ontological assumptions.

Based on previous literature, it was clear that a longitudinal study could make a positive contribution to knowledge, enabling me to build rapport with the young people and interview them at different time points throughout Years 10 and 11 in a way that would allow an exploration of their decision-making process over time to be captured. Furthermore, the importance of context in previous research was apparent (Foskett et al., 2008; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999), and so another alternative was to base the study in one institution so that flexibility was provided to enable me to visit the PRU on a number of occasions, in order for the study to incorporate the vital longitudinal aspect.

To this end, a longitudinal case study design was adopted, nested within a single PRU. As the PRU, as an organisation, formed the main case, an embedded case study was adopted with the individual participants forming the multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2009; Yin, 2012). A case study can be defined as a strategy that allows for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or a small number of cases within their real-world context, the aim of which is to provide an insight about their behaviour (Bromley, 1986; Robson, 2011; Yin, 2012). This definition highlights that the focus is on a real-life setting that has not been manipulated in any way (Yin, 2012), and was deemed appropriate in order to develop an understanding of the decision-making processes of the young people.

Advantages of case study research include the ability to gain an in-depth understanding of the case/cases, the capacity to focus on contextual conditions, and an ability to complete the study over time (Yin, 2012).

The main limitations of the design are the challenge of protecting the study against researcher bias and a perceived inability to generalise the results (Yin, 2012), however the current study was intended to be exploratory in nature, and so the findings were not intended to be generalisable. Yin (2012) explains, though, that 'analytic generalisations' can be made using a "theoretical framework to establish a logic that might be applicable to other situations" (p. 148), suggesting that it may be possible to make tentative generalisations in order to relate some findings to other, similar settings. Despite this, however, there was an acknowledgement that the present study was carried out in one particular PRU setting.

### *3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are the most widely used method of data collection in qualitative research (Willig, 2001), and this method was deemed appropriate as opposed to structured interviews, which could have limited the responses of the participants by forcing them to exclude interesting and important information regarding their experiences. With semi-structured interviews, an interview schedule is used by the researcher as a guide of topics that are intended to be covered; however, the order and phrasing of questions can be changed to suit the flow of the conversation, and often

other, unplanned, questions are asked following information provided by participants (Robson, 2011). These can be considered advantages of using interviews as a method of data collection, as well as the possibility of capturing rich data, especially in comparison to other methods such as questionnaires, which were considered but not chosen due to their rigidity. Disadvantages include the reliance on the skill of the interviewer in carrying out interviews in an unbiased way, and the length of time interviews take to administer (Robson, 2011), however due to the small sample, the length of time taken was not considered to be a limitation for the current study. Information regarding the consideration of researcher bias is detailed in section 3.11.

A flexible method of questioning was necessary, especially for the student participants, to ensure that a hard-to-reach and hard to interview population who are often described as 'voiceless' (Knipe et al., 2008; Wise & Upton, 1998) were able to engage appropriately. Ergo, various techniques were used, including rating scales and other techniques derived from SFBT (de Shazer et al., 1986). These are described in detail in section 3.6.1. Rating scales were also used in the adult interviews to acquire a clear idea of how supportive they felt they were in the students' decision-making processes.

## 3.6 Participants

### *3.6.1 Student participants*

Student participants were considered to be appropriate for this study if they were attending JR-PRU and were in Year 10 at the time when data collection

began. Seven students took part in this study, and all were in Year 10 at the point when data collection began, and Year 11 when data collection ended, and so were aged between 15 and 16. Table 2 shows each participant's reasons for being placed in JR-PRU. Names have been changed to honour anonymity.

**Table 2: Student participants' reasons for placement**

| Participant | Reason(s) for placement |
|---|---|
| Rebecca | High levels of anxiety and resulting poor attendance at mainstream school. |
| Paul | At risk of permanent exclusion. |
| Emma | At risk of permanent exclusion. |
| Martin | Permanently excluded once. Parental choice for him to attend PRU rather than apply for another mainstream school. |
| Chantelle | Looked after child (LAC) with high levels of anxiety and resulting poor attendance; at risk of fixed-term exclusion. |
| Laura | High levels of anxiety and resulting poor attendance; at risk of fixed-term exclusion. |
| Marc | High levels of anxiety and resulting poor attendance at mainstream school. |

Access to the young people at JR-PRU was obtained through working as a trainee educational psychologist in the focus borough and having a professional relationship with the head teacher. Whilst the size of the sample was small, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) suggest that for a qualitative

study such as this, between six and 12 participants are considered to be acceptable.

*3.6.2 Adult participants*

The head teacher of JR-PRU introduced the role of 'Vocational Curriculum Support Worker' (VCSW) to the staff team approximately two years prior to this research taking place. The role was varied, and included responsibilities related to supporting young people at the PRU, specifically in Years 10 and 11, to think about post-16 choices.

Two adult participants took part in the present study. These were the head teacher of JR-PRU and the VCSW. The main reasons for deciding to include these two adults were to enable more about the context of JR-PRU to be provided and to find out more about the role of the VCSW. For this reason, the adult participants were only interviewed once.

**3.7 Materials**

*3.7.1 Developing the student participants' interview schedules*

Advice provided by Robson (2011) was followed regarding general guidance for interviewers and the sorts of questions that should and should not be included, for example including open-ended questions where possible to enable in-depth responses from the participants, and preparing and using probes where necessary

*3.7.1.1 Wave One*

The interview schedule for Wave 1 (see Appendix 1. Also, see section 3.8 for information regarding the piloting of the wave 1 interview schedule) was developed using techniques which aimed to build rapport with the participants and to begin to answer the research questions. In order to build rapport with the young people, the interview schedule began with questions about the participant that were unrelated to the research, such as “How are you?”, “Tell me a bit about yourself”, and “What do you like doing in/out of school?”.

Questions related to their time at JR-PRU then followed, as it was felt important to learn how long the young people had been attending the PRU to understand the context from which they were coming.

A question using the ‘scaling’, technique derived from SFBT (de Shazer et al., 1986) was then used to find out, on a scale of zero to 10 how they felt about attending JR-PRU, with zero indicating ‘very much dislike’, and 10 indicating ‘really like/love’. Following this question, other related questions were included to further explore the answer they gave, such as “Why are you not a (x-1)?”, with ‘x’ relating to the number they gave, to understand factors that helped them to get to where they were on the scale, rather than being lower down. It was considered important to find out more about how they experienced the PRU setting, and so questions to explore this followed, such as, “What is different between the PRU and your mainstream school?”, and “Can you tell me about a typical day at the PRU?”. These first eight

questions were intended to find out information about the student participants in an informal way and to aid rapport-building.

Techniques derived from PCP (Kelly, 1955) were then included in order to gain a more personal understanding of the participants, and as such, a question designed to elicit their 'core constructs', which are beliefs that are considered to be most important to the person and thereby help them to interpret the world and their lives (Kelly, 1955), followed. To complete this, an activity was incorporated whereby the participant would be given six small pieces of paper that displayed different role titles, such as 'parent', 'closest friend', and 'memorable teacher'. After the participant has identified a person that related to each role, the question would be asked, "In what important way are two of these people similar, and thereby different from the third?". Questions such as "Why is that important" ('laddering') and "What might a person like that look like?" ('pyramiding') can then be asked in order to reach their subordinate and superordinate constructs, which are those that are most resistant to change and can tentatively be considered to be their core constructs (Kelly, 1955).

Additionally, constructs identified can be mapped onto a self-image profile (SIP, Butler, 2001). The SIP "has been developed to systematically represent a youngster's vision of self" (Butler & Green, 2007, p. 76), and consists of a table where the young person's progress on verbal representations of themselves, such as 'kind', 'funny' and 'intelligent', can be tracked against where they would like to be (e.g. 'not at all', 'very much',

etc.). An adapted SIP, which could be designed and completed during the interview, would allow for the verbal representations to be changed to ensure that they are specific to each young person. These questions, along with the completion of an adapted SIP, complemented the social constructionist ontological stance adopted due to its fundamental assumption of constructive alternativism. Considering the focus within the current study on participants' decision-making process regarding their future, it was anticipated that the questions derived from PCP would help to further inform the thinking process, build a fuller picture, and gain a sense of the journey of the young people.

Questions were then included to further explore the student participants' time at JR-PRU and to provide a sense of whether they were able to identify both positive and negative situations that they had experienced since attending. These were informed by Mainwaring and Hallam's (2010) research regarding possible selves, for example, "Can you think of something that has happened between September and now that you are happy about/proud of yourself for?"

The final four questions were related to the research questions of the study. The first three were to elicit information regarding what the participants were interested in doing in their immediate and longer-term future, and how they felt they would do this. The final question, which related to Research Question Two, would ask how close they felt they were to achieving their career-related goals, and reasons for this.

*3.7.1.2 Wave Two*

The interview schedule for Wave Two (see Appendix 2) was designed with the research questions of the study in mind, including questions such as, “Can you tell me how you came to make the decision about where to go, and what to do when you leave here?”, focusing on the first research question, and “What support has been available to you to help you make decisions about what to do when you leave here?”, which focused on the second research question. Participants’ responses in previous interviews were also used when designing this schedule, and so each one was individualised. The reason for this was two-fold: firstly, to allow for questions related to previous responses to be asked to capture the decision-making process over time, and secondly to ensure that participants were not asked to repeat themselves.

Questions were also asked in the second wave related to how students were feeling about leaving the PRU at the end of the academic year. These questions were based a solution-focused approach (de Shazer et al., 1986; Wagner & Gillies, 2001), such as “How do you think [name of FE setting chosen] will be different to the PRU?” and “Is there anything you’re worried/nervous/concerned about?” In order to get a sense of the journey of the young people, it was felt that solution-focused questions such as these would be helpful in understanding their emotional responses to having to make critical decisions regarding post-16 education and training. Scaling questions were again used throughout Waves Two and Three (de Shazer et al., 1986), and more questions were inspired by, although different from,

Mainwaring and Hallam's (2010) research, such as "If all goes well, where do you see yourself in five years time?" and "How likely do you feel it is that you will get there, on a scale of 0 to 10?"

General topics covered in the wave two interview schedule included how participants were feeling about being in their final year at JR-PRU, what plans they had made for when they left the PRU, their process of making any decisions made, and how likely they felt it was that they would reach their goals.

*3.7.1.3 Wave Three*

The Wave Three interview schedule (see Appendix 3) was also designed with the research questions and participants' responses to the first two waves of interviews in mind in order to further capture their journey over time. Focus was given to the same topic areas as in Wave Two, such as what plans they had made, whether these had changed or remained the same, and questions related to their process of decision-making. There was also a focus on this being the final interview, with the participants nearing the end of their time at JR-PRU, using more solution-focused questions (de Shazer et al., 1986; Wagner & Gillies, 2001), such as "What are you looking forward to about next year?", and those that encouraged them to visualise the manifestation of their choices in order to explore their feelings, such as "Say you turn up at [name of FE setting chosen] tomorrow, what do you think it will be like?"

*3.7.2 Developing the adult participants' interview schedules*

The interview schedule for the head teacher (see Appendix 4) included topics related to the context, strengths and challenges of supporting the students to make decisions, and the support provided to the PRU by the LA. For example, to explore the context, questions included "What are the reasons young people normally attend this PRU?" and "In the past, where have young people progressed to after key stage 4 education here?". To understand the perceived strengths and challenges regarding supporting the students to make decisions about next steps, questions such as "How does the PRU support students to make decisions related to moving on after finishing here at the end of Year 11?" were asked. "What support do you receive in order to help the young people make these important decisions, and what does this support look like?" was asked to find out more about the support provided to the PRU by the LA. Finally, questions related to the young people's transition from JR-PRU were included, such as "Once the young people have finished their key stage 4 education here, how is their transition from [name of PRU] managed and supported?".

The VCSW interview schedule (see Appendix 5) included topics related to her role and context within JR-PRU, such as "Can you describe your role within [name of PRU]?"; the way in which she had supported young people, both in the past and from the current cohort, such as "What has worked well in the past for supporting young people at this PRU to make decisions about next steps after leaving here?"; and the support offered throughout the transition for the young people, such as "How is the transition from here to

FE colleges / apprenticeships / etc. supported after the young people have completed their GCSEs?".

Both adult interviews also included a scaling question (de Shazer et al., 1986), similar to the student interviews, related to how well they felt the PRU supported students in making decisions regarding post-16 education and training. Finally, as we know that educational psychologists regularly work in and with PRUs using various psychological models (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Cullen & Raomoutar, 2003), a question was included on both adult interview schedules about how they thought the role of the educational psychologist may help to support the vulnerable students with their decision-making.

### 3.8 Pilot

Completing a pilot interview using Wave One of the student interview schedule was deemed important in order to check the feasibility of the study and ensure that questions were understood by, and appropriate for, the participants. It was also important to ensure that the scaling questions and those derived from PCP were clearly understood and able to be engaged with. Furthermore, considering the vulnerable nature of the participants, and their SEMH needs such as anxiety, a pilot interview was vital to ensure that the questions I had intended to ask would not cause any discomfort or distress. Yin (2009) refers to a 'pre-test', which Robson (2011) calls a 'formal dress rehearsal' for the data collection plan that can be tested out in a real world situation. This was the aim of the pilot interview for the present study.

The interview schedule for wave one was piloted on a young person in Year 10 at JR-PRU prior to the beginning of the study. The pilot provided some interesting and important implications. I noted that the young person's responses were very short at the beginning of the interview, and slowly became longer and more detailed as time went on. A lack of effective rapport building before beginning the interview seemed a plausible explanation, and so this was something I ensured I improved on for the interviews with the young people. This was done in two ways. Firstly, in order to begin building rapport prior to the commencement of the study, I attempted to embed myself within the PRU as much as possible by spending three hours at the PRU over a two-week period, during the young people's lunch times. This allowed me to be introduced to prospective participants in an informal manner, and allowed for the possibility that they may begin feeling more comfortable with me prior to meeting them to carry out interviews. During this time, I took the opportunity to explain more about the research and checked informally whether the young people were still interested in taking part. Secondly, other rapport building techniques were used at the beginning of the interviews, such as providing several magazines for the young people to flick through whilst speaking to the young people prior to using the voice recorder, asking them about themselves and telling them about myself; getting to know each other a little more in a more informal, relaxed environment.

Completing a pilot interview with a young person also gave me an idea of how long an interview may take, and so I felt that I was able to provide an

estimate to each participant at the beginning of each interview. Naturally, however, some participants were more talkative than others, and so whilst this was an accurate estimation for some, it was either longer or shorter than others' interviews. Additionally, during the pilot, I omitted a question related to applying the participants' core constructs to a SIP. The reason for this was because by this point in the interview the time had reached 25 minutes, and due to the time I knew it took to complete these activities from my previous experience of using a SIP it was decided that it would result in the interview lasting too long.

At the end of the pilot I asked the young person how he found the questions and whether any of them were difficult for him to answer. He explained that he had understood questions and felt that he was able to provide relevant answers. No other questions were changed following the pilot.

Robson (2011) explains that at times it can be impossible to carry out a pilot interview, and as in this case, the flexibility of a case study design allows for the opportunity to 'learn on the job'. It was for this reason that I did not complete a pilot for the adult interviews, due to there only being one head teacher and one VCSW at JR-PRU. The majority of the questions were specific to their roles, and so it was not feasible to pilot the questions with other adults.

## 3.9 Research procedure: Student participants

### *3.9.1 Recruitment of student participants*

The seven student participants accounted for almost half of the Year 10 population at the time, which consisted of 15 young people. Ethical considerations within this group of vulnerable students played a crucial role in the recruitment of participants. As part of this I had an initial discussion with the head teacher, who was very open to the research but felt that there were some students who did not attend enough, which would create challenges related to the longitudinal aspect of the research. It was deemed necessary to meet with the head teacher in order to inform her about the research and to consider potential participants collaboratively.

One of the challenges when working with vulnerable pupils in PRUs is that they often have high levels of absence (Pirrie & Macleod, 2009), and so I was mindful that I did not want to exclude all young people in JR-PRU who were considered to be harder to reach, and tried to be as inclusive as possible because I was sensitive that some young people would be more vulnerable than others. Out of the cohort of 15 students, it became clear through talking to the head teacher that some did not attend at all and some did not attend with any sense of regularity. To this end, whilst I felt the need to reduce my sampling criteria, I ensured that I was as flexible as I could be to enable the young people to engage with the process even if they were not able to meet at each wave of interviews. Despite the head teacher explaining that it was likely that it would be challenging to organise to meet with Chantelle and Laura at three different time points, mainly because of

their high levels of anxiety and poor attendance, I was keen to include them in my sample to ensure that it was more representative of the population of students in JR-PRU.

Following this, the head teacher approached the potential participants to gauge their interest in taking part in the study. I then posted the Parent Letter and Parental Consent Form (see Appendix 6) to the parents of the seven identified students who had shown an interest in taking part in the study during discussions with the head teacher. Each letter contained a stamped addressed envelope in order to increase the response rate. The Parent Letter explained the purpose of the research and the role of the participants, and also included a consent form to enable parental consent to be obtained as the young people were all below the age of 18 (see Appendix 6).

The head teacher then scheduled appointment times for me to meet with the young people individually for the first interview. This took place at JR-PRU during school time, and required each student to miss one lesson. On the day of the first interviews, I met with each student in order to fully explain the research and provide further opportunities for the young people to ask me any questions they may have had about the research. A student information sheet containing all of the relevant information (see Appendix 7) was given to the young people who followed while I read it to them and asked questions to ensure understanding. They were asked if they were still happy to take part, and were asked to complete the informed consent form if they were. All

seven young people showed a willingness to be involved in the study and completed the consent form. The first wave of interviews was then administered immediately.

The final sample included a mixture of vulnerable students, consisting of one student who had been permanently excluded, two who were at risk of being permanently excluded, one LAC, and three who were reported to have particularly high levels of anxiety, although all students were reported to display behaviour related to anxiety.

*3.9.2 Student interview procedure*

Data collection spanned an eight-month period, beginning in July 2015 and ending in March 2016, and consisted of three sets of interviews with each student participant. The first interview took place in July 2015 to ensure that data collection began when the students were in Year 10 to obtain an idea of their thinking at this time. The second interview took place in December 2015 as this was the time when the head teacher of the PRU suggested that most students would have made their decisions. Finally, a third interview took place in March 2016 as it was important not to disrupt the young people given that their GCSEs were starting imminently after this time. It was decided that three interviews over the eight-month period would allow the research to capture a sense of how the young people's decisions developed over time. Adult participants were interviewed once, in December 2015.

All interviews took place at JR-PRU so that participants were in a familiar environment at all times. Each interview was carried out in a quiet room, the booking of which was organised by the head teacher.

Before each wave of interviews took place, I began by introducing and reminding participants of the reason I was meeting with them. Important information regarding the study, which had been read to participants using the Student Information Sheet (see Appendix 7), was re-iterated and the young people were encouraged to ask any questions, which were answered immediately. Before beginning the interviews, participants were asked once again whether they were still willing to take part.

Following each interview there was a short debrief in the form of checking whether participants had any other questions. They were more thoroughly debriefed at the end of the final interview with a re-explanation of the aim of the research. They were then encouraged to ask any questions they had before I explained my next steps to write up the research and a participant summary sheet, of which I explained they would receive a copy. Student interviews lasted up to 53 minutes, and were all recorded using a digital recording device.

### 3.10 Research procedure: Adult participants

The head teacher and VCSW were approached, and following a brief explanation were asked if they would be interested in taking part in the current research. At a later date, I provided them with the Staff Information

Sheet and informed consent form (see Appendix 8). They were asked to read this in their own time and were encouraged to ask any questions about the research and their participation. They then provided consent by completing the attached informed consent form (Appendix 8).

Both adult interviews took place in their respective offices within JR-PRU, ensuring that they were also in a familiar environment. Before each interview began, I re-iterated the aim of the current study and encouraged them to ask any questions they might have had. As with the student interviews, the adult participants were also asked once again whether they were still happy to take part before the interview began.

Following the interviews, the adults were debriefed in the same way as the student participants. The adults' interviews both lasted approximately 90 minutes.

### 3.11 Data analysis

#### *3.11.1 Thematic analysis*

Thematic analysis was used as a method to analyse the data collected during interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative technique described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 6). It allows for the organisation and a rich description of the data and benefits from the significant advantage of its flexibility. As with all analysis techniques, thematic analysis is not without its weaknesses, namely that it is heavily reliant on the skills of the

researcher, and the aforementioned flexibility can result in inconsistent uses of the method.

Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) emphasise that there are different approaches to thematically analyse data, and the approach chosen should be governed by the 'primary analytic purpose', which may be to explore, identify, explain, confirm or compare. The current study aimed to *explore* how young people at JR-PRU made decisions about post-16 pathways, and so Guest et al. (2012) suggest that 'exploratory analysis' is most appropriate. This procedure is also known as inductive thematic analysis, which aims to provide a rich, general description of transcripts, rather than a theoretically driven examination of a specific issue within them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is reinforced by Guest et al. (2012), who highlight that the identification of codes and themes is driven by the content of the communication between the researcher and the participant.

The data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis following the procedure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) and further informed by Guest et al.'s (2012) interpretation of 'applied thematic analysis', which they argue "can involve multiple analytic techniques" (p.4), reinforcing the flexibility of the approach. It is important to note, however, that whilst themes identified were data-driven rather than theory-driven, my theoretical and epistemological assumptions as a researcher were inevitably present in the analysis of the data, such as knowledge of previous research on the topic and from previous experience of working with young people in PRUs. Due to

the social constructionist ontology (Burr, 2003) chosen for this study, the themes were identified at the semantic level and related to previous literature where possible.

Other methods of data analysis were considered. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an idiographic approach that aims to understand lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to these experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA complements a social constructionist ontology in supporting an exploration of an individual's psychological understanding of the world (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2008), and so IPA was considered as a method of data analysis for the current study.

Whilst the small sample of the current research lends itself to an IPA approach, it was considered less appropriate than thematic analysis in this instance for several reasons. Firstly, Smith (2004) argues that IPA should begin with a detailed investigation of one particular case "until some degree of closure or gestalt has been achieved" (p. 41) before moving onto the next case. Due to the longitudinal nature of the current study and the importance of making each follow-up interview individual to each participant, it was important for interview data to be coded following each wave, resulting in the analytic process taking place in a less structured way than Smith (2004) suggests is necessary within an IPA approach.

Secondly, it is likely that if an IPA approach had been adopted the adult participants would not have been included due to their interviews being mainly to gain more information regarding the context of JR-PRU, rather than to focus purely on their experiences of a phenomenon. This contextual information was considered to be vital within the current study due to previous literature that has asserted the importance of this (Foskett et al., 2008; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999). Thirdly, whilst I was interested in individual experiences of each participant, it was important within this research to adopt an holistic approach to the data analysis process, resulting in a broader focus taking the context of JR-PRU into account, for which thematic analysis can be considered more appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Content analysis was also considered for the present study. Similarities are often drawn between content analysis and thematic analysis as they both comprise searching for patterns across a data set (Wilkinson, 2000). Content analysis involves searching for meaning through the analysis of text (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). This form of data analysis was not considered to be appropriate for the current research due to the focus on surface information in the data set rather than a deeper exploration, and the tendency to quantify qualitative data through a statistical analysis of elements of the data, such as certain words (Boyatzis, 1998; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013), which would not have been helpful for the current research.

*3.11.2 Process of analysis*

The process of analysis was guided by the phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). A summary now follows of the steps taken to analyse the data.

Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data

The interviews from each wave were transcribed shortly after interviews were conducted. All interview data were fully transcribed by myself, so as to increase the accuracy of transcription and to ensure that, as the researcher, I was fully embedded within the data. During transcription of the interviews, all identifying characteristics of each participant, and any other people mentioned, were changed or removed to honour anonymity. The real names of the participants have not been used.

As I was most interested in the content of what was said in the interviews, rather than the way in which it was said, pauses and 'erms' were omitted from transcription unless they were felt to be particularly pertinent. Transcripts were read and re-read, whilst listening to the recordings, in order to correct any human errors made during the transcription process, as well as to become more embedded within, and familiar with, the data. Initial ideas were noted during this phase, however they were not added to transcripts until phase 2 (see below), as the notes taken were primarily to provoke thought and to share with my research supervisors.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Transcripts were imported into NVivo 10, and each wave was coded soon after the interviews were conducted, meaning that each wave was coded prior to the commencement of the following wave. Table 3 shows an example of initial codes that were generated in Marc's transcript (see Appendix 9 for an example of a fully coded transcript).

**Table 3: Transcript extract with initial codes**

| Extract (Marc, wave 2) | Initial codes |
|---|---|
| M: Yeah. I was talking to [VCSW] and she was asking me about what I want to do, and I came to realise I'm in Year 11, I need to start thinking about what I want to do, because when you're in Year 10 you don't really care, and as soon as you hit Year 11 you're like, 'I have to actually make life choices right now'. It was very hard but I did a lot of research at home on it because the stuff we did here, yeah it helped, but the more stuff you read into, the more likely you're going to find something that suited you. I came across N and I was like, 'Oh, I may as well look at the apprenticeships', and I saw it and I took it into school and we sent off a letter to them. | Adult (VCSW) prompting career thinking.<br><br>Year 11 = decision time.<br><br>Student doing career research. |
| R: Who's 'we'? | PRU helping student with exploration. |
| M: Me and [VCSW]. She sat with me, we filled it in. | PRU and student collaboration. |

To enhance the reliability of the coding, I completed a modified version of inter-coder agreement (Guest et al., 2012), whereby I coded a full transcript with a second coder. We both suggested codes for each section of text. If our suggested codes differed, we viewed this as a 'disagreement' (Guest et

al., 2012) and deliberated on our reasoning until we either agreed on one of the codes or created a new, all-encompassing, code.

Table 4 shows an example of a situation where the second coder and I had a disagreement when coding Marc's transcript and the code that was agreed upon following our discussion.

**Table 4: An example of a coding disagreement**

| Extract (Marc, wave 2 ) | Diagreement | Agreed code |
|---|---|---|
| J: ... and I was looking through and I had written a list of... I had [name of college a] and [name of college b], and on the [college b] side I had the accountancy apprenticeship, and on the [college a] side I had A-Levels - so I would do the three A-Levels I said before. I just went to [VCSW] and said that I didn't know what to do and she said 'Why don't you just do the apprenticeship because one, you're earning, you're learning, and there's always a possibility to go back after that 12 month period and get A-Levels, and at least then, if I get the A-Levels, work in accounts and realise I don't like it, then I've just wasted a year, so I want to get a feel for what it's like before I actually... | VCSW influencing decision (Researcher) / PRU suggesting idea (Coder 2) | PRU & YP collaboration |

Phase 3: Searching for themes

This phase consists of collating codes into potential themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I completed this by extracting all codes into Microsoft Word (see Appendix 10 for the complete list of student participant codes generated, and Appendix 11 for the complete list of adult participant codes generated). Initially, due to waiting some time in between completing phases one and two for each wave of interviews, there were many repetitions of codes, and some that were phrased differently but had the same meaning. I first amalgamated these codes so that the coding was more efficient.

Potential themes started to become apparent by noting codes that appeared to link with each other in various ways. These were noted by hand in the form of rough mind maps. In doing this, some codes were grouped to create themes and sub-themes. During this phase, however, some overarching themes were demoted to sub-themes and vice-verca, and some codes were removed from the theme 'map' completely due to a realisation that they were not as influential within the data as had initially appeared. For example, I initially identified a sub-theme of 'the importance of feeling supported'; however on closer inspection, all of the codes related to this sub-theme were better placed in two other sub-themes within the same overarching theme of 'support', namely 'the importance of an established relationship' and 'support is informal and always available'. Similarly, a sub-theme of 'independence' was initially created; however there was not sufficient evidence in the data for this sub-theme to remain as an independent sub-theme, and was removed.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes

As asserted by Braun and Clarke (2006), this phase consists of two levels. The first level was completed by reading through all of the extracts that related to each code within each theme to ensure that the codes were truly representative of the identified theme. During this level, some codes were removed from various sub-themes due to the codes either misrepresenting the data or due to some segments of data being coded twice with different names. Due to there having been a large number of codes encompassing the data set, there were some codes missed during phase three causing this to take place. Once this level had been completed I moved on to level two.

During level two, the themes identified were checked to ensure that they accurately reflected the data as a whole. In order to do this I read through each transcript once again, to check that the 'story' had been captured by the themes posited. As the data had been inductively analysed, it quickly became apparent that the themes did reflect the data set, and during this level of phase four I found some more data extracts that related to the themes, further ensuring that the data set was accurately captured by the themes and sub-themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

This phase consisted of naming and re-naming themes and sub-themes to ensure that the names were an accurate reflection of the data extracts they referred to. The theme 'practicalities' was initially named 'motivations', as it was felt that 'geographical proximity' and 'money matters' could be

considered factors that motivated the young people to either choose or avoid an FE setting. Due to the word 'motivation' having various meanings and connotations, however, it was later decided that the term 'practicalities' better reflected the extracts that contributed to the sub-themes. Similarly, the theme 'self-confidence' was initially named 'confidence'; however, for the same reasons it was felt that 'self-confidence' was a truer reflection of the extracts that supported the theme.

This phase also consisted of planning the Findings chapters of this research write-up in detail, thinking about the overall 'story' and how the identified extracts captured this. Changes were made during the write-up process to ensure that the Findings chapters accurately reflected the inductive analysis of the interview data. For example, as an important feature of the current study was its longitudinal nature, a third Findings chapter was initially included that described each student participant's journey. However, to describe their journeys accurately there were many repetitions of codes that had already been used in the first two Findings chapters, and so it was felt to be more appropriate to add the pertinent unique extracts into the current chapters to ensure that the longitudinal design was apparent throughout the findings.

Braun and Clarke (2006) also describe phase six of the analytic process, which has manifested in the write-up of this thesis.

### 3.12 The role of the researcher

As asserted by Yardley (2000), the trustworthiness of qualitative measures is more challenging to address than more conventional quantitative research tools, partly due to the difficulties in defining the standards by which to compare and evaluate these. The following section addresses the strategies that were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, in order to avoid completing invalid research (Robson, 2011). Yardley (2000) refers to these as 'quality control' and emphasises that each aspect is "open to flexible interpretation" (p. 219), which is complementary to the social constructionist ontological stance adopted throughout this study (Burr, 2003).

#### *3.12.1 The researcher/practitioner conflict*

Robson (2011) stresses the importance of recognising and reflecting on the impact of the context in which the researcher is embedded and the values that he or she holds on the completion of qualitative research.

Whilst carrying out this research, the boundaries between my role as a trainee educational psychologist and my role as a researcher became somewhat blurred. I began the current research during my second year of training as a trainee educational psychologist, and in my third year I was allocated JR-PRU as one of my 'link schools'. As a result, I became indirectly involved in my work as a trainee educational psychologist with a student who was also a participant in the research. I felt a conflict of interest as I had some knowledge that may have helped the staff at JR-PRU to understand this young person more holistically; however, I was bound by

confidentiality and so was not at liberty to provide information which may have been helpful for the staff to know, and in turn helpful for the student, who was presenting as extremely disaffected with her learning.

I also found it useful to reflect on how my role as an interviewer was influenced by the training I received to be an educational psychologist. When transcribing the interview data I noticed that, at times, the way in which I responded to participants' answers was in line with my work as a trainee educational psychologist, in which I am often trying to help a client to arrive at a solution. This represents another conflict of interest between the two roles. In order to minimise the impact of this, I attempted to pay more attention to my responses and discussed the role conflict within research supervision.

*3.12.2 Sensitivity to context*

This measure encompasses various elements. Importance is given to the researcher having a clear understanding of the approaches and perspectives adopted to enable a more comprehensive analysis. I have made use of research supervision and have engaged with literature that supported my data analysis. Furthermore, whilst the majority of studies that use thematic analysis refer only to Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure, I have also considered, and made use of, a less widely used text by Guest et al. (2012), which has developed my skills in the data analysis process.

Yardley (2000) also highlights the importance of having an understanding of the socio-cultural setting, which, in this case, I had developed over time, drawing on my role as a researcher and a trainee educational psychologist. Yardley (2000) refers to the concept of 'neutrality', which is also referred to by Beaver (2011) as an attempt to understand participants' discourse without passing judgment. This is a very familiar concept that is given substantial focus during educational psychology training, and is something I practise on a daily basis in this role. Yardley (2000) also makes reference to the effects of the researcher, which links to researcher bias as described by Robson (2011). It has been interesting to reflect on the possible impact I may have had as the 'researcher-instrument' (Robson, 2011) due to elements that were mostly out of my control, such as the power imbalance, especially between myself and the student participants (Yardley, 2000). I attempted to decrease the impact of this by spending time at JR-PRU in an informal capacity before the research began. Additionally, as part of the reason for choosing the topic for the present study was rooted in the data provided by the LA that suggested that the trajectories of the young people who had attended JR-PRU in the past was more positive than national data would suggest is normally the case in PRUs, it was important to consider the effects of researcher bias related to my positive view of the institution and the positive reputation of the head teacher within the LA. Research supervision was useful here, as areas of possible bias were identified and discussed which helped me as the researcher to reduce the risk of researcher bias.

*3.12.3 Transparency, coherence and reflexivity*

Transparency of the analysis was met with the detailed description of how the data were collected and handled. An example of a fully coded transcript is included (see Appendix 9) so that the codes used during the coding stage of the analysis are clear. It is also acknowledged that my own views, values and beliefs will unavoidably have had an impact on the thematic interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2007); however this is an accepted element of qualitative data analysis.

*3.12.4 Reliability*

There is an argument that it is inappropriate to attempt to measure the reliability and replicability of a qualitative piece of research such as this, "if the purpose of the researcher is to offer just one of many possible interpretations of a phenomenon, or to study a situation which is in the process of changing, or a discourse which is itself inherently inconsistent" (Yardley, 2000, p. 218). Despite this however, to increase the inter-rater reliability of the thematic coding process, a method of inter-coder agreement was carried out, as explained in section 3.11.2.

**3.13 Chapter summary**

This chapter outlined the qualitative methodology adopted to complete the present study. An embedded case study with seven student and two adult participants, which made up the multiple units of analysis, was used with semi-structured interviews adopted as the method of data collection. A longitudinal design was used in order to capture the participants' process of

decision-making, including changes to decisions made and reasons for these. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data and the role of the researcher and ethical issues were highlighted.

# Chapter 4: How did the young people make their decisions?

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research results relating to the ways in which the young people who took part in this study made choices related to their post-16 options. The themes identified from the interviews are presented in relation to:

**Research question one:** How do young people at a PRU make decisions about moving on after key stage 4 education?

The themes were derived from the young people's interviews and were supported where appropriate by the adult interviews. There were three themes that were identified in relation to research question one; 'practicalities', 'building on experience' and 'support'. Each of these themes and related sub-themes is considered with reference to detailed accounts that are drawn from the data. Table 5 below presents three themes and related sub-themes, and Figure 1 shows these themes and sub-themes in the form of a thematic map.

**Table 5: Themes identified in relation to research question one**

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| **1. Practicalities** | 1.1 Geographical proximity<br>1.2 Money matters |
| **2. Building on positive** | 2.1 Enjoyment of a subject area |

| | |
|---|---|
| **experiences** | 2.2 Strengths perceived by others |
| **3. Support** | 3.1 The importance of an established relationship<br>3.2 Support is informal and always available<br>3.3 Next steps are always on the agenda of staff |

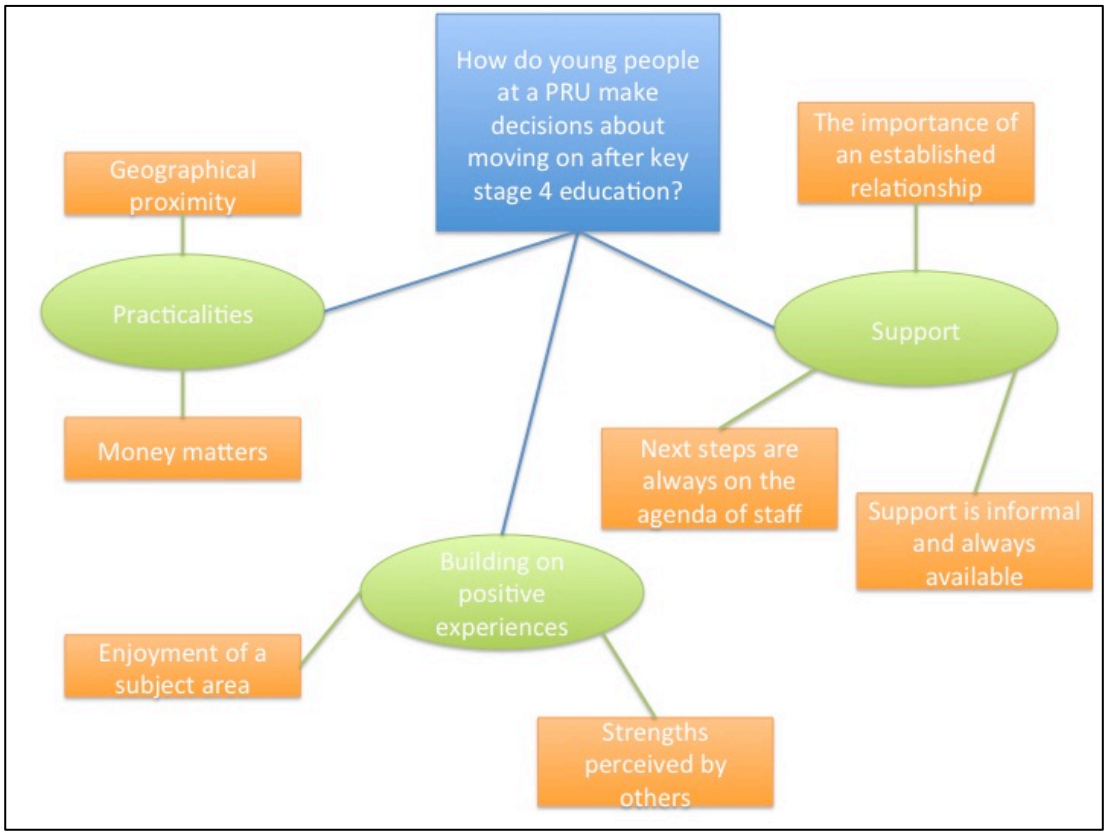


**Figure 1. Thematic map showing themes identified in relation to research question one.**

### 4.2 Theme 1: Practicalities

*4.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Geographical proximity*

The majority of the young people referred to their motivation to choose a post-16 option based on how far they would have to travel from their home:

> Well, I kind of thought, it's down the end of my road, I like Art, might as well see what it's like there. (Laura)

For some young people the issue of proximity was important enough to settle for a choice despite also being interested in other areas, and it was also important enough to question whether they had made the right choice for them:

> I wouldn't mind doing something in animal care, but that's (name of college), and that's really far, so I think I might just stick with Art for now. (Laura)

> (Name of college), that's where the apprenticeship was, so it's a bit of a distance but (name of another college) is kind of a bit closer so I was like, "Alright, I'm going to look through". (Marc)

For other young people, proximity was something they were worried about. Chantelle did not initially make her choice based on proximity, but still described her concern related to the distance the college was from her home:

> ...and just that it's quite far from home, do you know what I mean? So it's out of my comfort zone, I can't just call my nan and say, "Can you please come and pick me up?" That's what I do, like, if I have

> problems here, “Can you please come...” She’s not going to be able to do that much longer.

As Chantelle could get very anxious in new and unknown situations, it was clear how frightening the idea was of not being able to phone her nan to ask her to pick her up.

A common feeling for young people in relation to proximity was either not looking forward to traveling perceived long distances or, in contrast, looking forward to not having to travel far:

> [Not looking forward to] the waking up times and the distance to get there. (Martin)

> It’s down the road from me, of course I’m going to do it! (Rebecca)

For these young people the decision was not made with proximity in mind, although it was mentioned in relation to something that they were or were not looking forward to about moving on from JR-PRU.

*4.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Money matters*

Another sub-theme that became evident during data analysis in relation to practical concerns was the financial implications of the young people’s decisions. There was a desire to choose something that they felt would earn

them a considerable amount of money in the future, and avoid something that would not:

> I'll do mechanics because my grandad done mechanics and he made a lot of money from it. (Paul)

> Yeah, I really wanted to do that. Then I got told that it was really rubbish money so I was like fine, I won't. (Chantelle)

> I need to get a job that pays me to live. So I was thinking so far into the future about how when I have kids I want to be able to buy them stuff and I don't always want to be like, "Oh no, you can't have that because we don't have the money", you know, I kind of want to have enough money to be able to live comfortably. (Marc)

Marc's quote shows that, when talking about money, he was referring to a wider factor regarding the importance of having a family in the future and being able to support them financially.

The more immediate impact of financial implications also directly affected the route chosen by a young person to obtain the necessary qualifications. Marc decided that he may not want to do an apprenticeship because he felt that it would not pay him enough while he was learning, and also did not want to go to university to avoid incurring debts through student loans:

> Yeah just kind of like long hours and what you get paid for the long hours if you know what I mean so it's kind of...

> Because I always thought oh, I'm going to go to college, I'm going to study this, do A-Levels, blah blah blah, but then I was just thinking, eventually if I went down that road I'd probably end up going to uni, and uni fees are just dreadful, and I wouldn't want to have that debt on me at such a young age.

It was evident that the amount of money it cost for an individual to read at university to obtain a degree was discouraging some young people, such as Marc, from wanting to enter higher education in the future.

When thinking about what the young people were looking forward to about the following year, after they would have left JR-PRU, Paul showed the importance of earning money by commenting on the fact that he would be paid whilst completing the apprenticeship by simply replying:

> Money... getting paid.

### 4.3 Theme 2: Building on positive experiences

#### *4.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Enjoyment of a subject area*

Some students explained that they made their decision on what to do when they left the PRU based on what they enjoyed and what they were good at:

> So I was like, “I like numbers, I’m pretty good at Maths, and my mum’s an accountant, so she obviously knows this, so if I wanted to ask her anything she’d be able to answer me”, so I was like, “I may actually give this a try”. (Marc)

When asked what made her decide to apply to do Art at a college, Laura simply explained:

> Because I really like Art, yeah.

The majority of the young people who described their enjoyment of a subject area referred to subjects that were not normally an option for young people attending mainstream schools. This reflected the time, effort and energy that JR-PRU made to put these courses in place as part of their wider curriculum for the young people, as became evident during Wave 1 of interviews when asked what subjects the participants were engaging with at the PRU:

> Child Development, PE, Ethics, English, Maths, Science, Art. There’s another one... Hair and Beauty. (Emma)

Emma had already been completing a course in Hair and Beauty facilitated by a local college for two days a week whilst attending JR-PRU. During the first wave of interviews, she explained that she was considering continuing with this at college:

> Go to college [...] either Hair and Beauty because I like it, or, like, I don't know yet.

During Wave 2 interviews, Emma had clearly been continuing to think about what she would like to do at college and her thinking had moved on:

> Either Hair and Beauty or Childcare [...] Because at the minute I'm already doing Hair and Beauty at college, but I'd like to do Childcare as well.

She had decided somewhere in between the first and second interview that she was interested in becoming a Midwife, which was why she was also considering studying Childcare. In the final interview with Emma, her decision had been made:

> Yeah I want to do an apprenticeship in Hair and Beauty at [name of college] and I have got an interview.

When asked how she had narrowed her decision down, she said:

> I want to do Hair and Beauty for a couple of years because I've already got my level one, so I may as well do level two and then do Childcare.

During the decision-making process, Emma had not lost sight of her end goal of becoming a Midwife, but decided that as she had already started a course in Hair and Beauty, it would be beneficial for her to continue with it so that she could work within this field whilst studying Childcare in the future:

> Yeah, because what I was thinking is that if I do Level two of Hair and Beauty then while I'm at college doing my Childcare then I can still do hair and beauty professionally and still earn money when I'm learning about child care.

Following Emma's decision-making journey shows the weight that she put on already having started learning about Hair and Beauty, a more vocational subject that was not offered as standard in many mainstream schools, when deciding what to do after leaving JR-PRU. It also showed the importance of the wider curriculum offer within JR-PRU.

*4.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Strengths perceived by others*

The young people's strengths as perceived by others appeared to be a helpful factor when making decisions about next steps. For some participants this was based mainly on teachers, and for others it was a member of their family's perception that was important:

> They use what I know I'm good at, like my mum always said that she had an idea that I would do something in Maths because I was always

> someone who would look at a problem and I'd find a way to solve it, or I'd be determined to solve it." (Marc)
>
> I'm just listening to other people's ideas. I'm getting told to go to Art college because I'm apparently really good at Art, then I'm getting told to do this. Obviously if people are telling you then it means you're actually quite good at it. (Chantelle)

The staff at JR-PRU appeared to be aware of the importance of other people's perceptions of the students' strengths, as was shown when the VCSW explained the following about a student who used to attend the PRU:

> Last year one of the girls was really creative, had no idea whatsoever, so I said, "How about working in a florist? I can see you working with flowers." Before I knew it she had gone and got a job, they took her on as an apprenticeship."

This was also reflected in the young people's interviews as other people's positive perceptions of the young people's strengths in specific areas were also motivating factor when making decisions. During Wave 1 interviews, Rebecca was keen to pursue becoming a primary school teacher, and felt aware of how to reach this goal:

> I'm going to have to do Maths, English, Science, all of that, to get there, and then uni... two years of primary teaching at uni.

During the second wave of interviews, Rebecca had completely changed her mind about her choice of career. She had decided that she wanted to become a Make-up Artist in the field of media because:

> I thought if I became a teacher it was going to be boring, so I thought I'd have a bit of fun.

When I met with Rebecca for the third time, she explained that she had changed her mind back to wanting to become a primary school teacher once again:

> Changed my job profession again. [...] Yeah, I changed it back to... back to a primary school teacher.

When asked what had brought on the change, Rebecca's response showed that her reasoning for changing her mind in the first place may have been due to feeling scared that she would not be intelligent enough to qualify as a teacher, and she continued to place importance upon others' perceptions of her strengths:

> Talking to [VCSW] and [Youth Worker], and just teachers in general and they said that I'd be wasting my talent if I took the easy way [...] so they said I should just go for it, I should try and do it. Because I was too scared to do it, but they said I should.

> Everyone around me has always said, “You need to be a primary school teacher... you need to... you’ve got that about you”, yeah, so teachers around school and my mum, and my grandma who’s a teacher. (Rebecca)

> ...I’ve always been a person who’s like, “I’m not going to go to uni, I’m not smart enough”, but I think I’m just going to try... and I think I can.

Through adults being honest with Rebecca about where they considered her strengths were, Rebecca reported that she felt confident enough to pursue the job she had dreamed of doing for a long time, despite her fears preventing her from doing so.

### 4.4 Theme 3: Support

#### *4.4.1 Sub-theme 1: The importance of an established relationship*

When speaking about careers guidance external to JR-PRU, the head teacher spoke about the importance of an established relationship, based on events from the previous year:

> Last year she also did do some careers-type work with our students [...] I have to say it wasn’t that successful, I don’t think. I think perhaps because she didn’t really know them that well, and so although she probably knew a lot about careers, it wasn’t necessarily as targeted to

> the individual, and actually it almost caused more confusion. I wouldn't do it again.

The suggestion here was that the young people at JR-PRU should find it more beneficial speaking to someone whom they knew well, and who knew them well, about post-16 decisions. The head teacher explained what had happened the previous year following the external advice, appearing as though the external guidance had resulted in a potentially unsuccessful decision being made:

> ...and so I think one of the students ended up making applications for things, or going along with things, and afterwards we thought, "What? They wouldn't be able to do that", or, "That's a bit out of their..."

Another related factor was how comfortable vulnerable young people, such as the sample of this study, felt talking to unfamiliar adults about post-16 career choices. Still speaking about external careers advice:

> I think in mainstream schools with the majority of students it can work because perhaps some students have a greater ability to go into a room with a strange person and actually know what they want and be able to communicate effectively and come out with a bit of paper knowing that they're going to go and apply for such and such, you know, because that's how it tends to work, it's just in, out, in, out. But, I think, for our students that doesn't work because, for a whole variety

> of reasons, a lot of them find communicating difficult; new people, social anxiety, lots of background, and if you don't know that background you wouldn't know that actually, they often say the first thing that comes into their head just to fill the silence, or... you know, there's all sorts of reasons, so I don't think an external person just coming every now and again would work for us. (head teacher)

This extract also highlighted the head teacher's perceived importance of more continual support, rather than an adult visiting occasionally to provide advice. The experience and opinions shared by the head teacher were reinforced by the young people. For example, when asked why she felt so supported in making decisions by JR-PRU, Rebecca answered:

> It's the relationship I have with them, it just pushes it up a bit more.

Similarly, when asked if he was aware of any support other than from staff within the PRU, Marc explained:

> I know there's a careers advice woman, or something like that, but I haven't really looked into it because I haven't felt the need to, because I've already got a plan. So at the moment I'd say that I'm confident about what I want to do, but it's still good that I check in regularly with [VCSW], because she knows me so well.

Marc also explained how the VCSW helped and guided him with his decision-making when he was not completely certain of the route he wanted to take between an apprenticeship or completing A-Levels. The importance of the VCSW knowing him well was clear:

> I just went to [VCSW] and said that I didn't know what to do and she said, "Why don't you do the apprenticeship because one, you're earning, you're learning, and there's always a possibility to go back after that 12 month period and get A-Levels", and at least then, if I get the A-Levels, work in accounts and realise I don't like it, then I've just wasted a year, so I want to get a feel for what it's like before I actually...

The VCSW also focused on the fact that Marc would get paid whilst completing an apprenticeship, further showing the importance of knowing him well when helping him to make decisions, as this was something he had expressed was important to him.

The importance of an established relationship, which had been built over time, was also evident from interviews with Laura. During the second interview, she explained that the VCSW had helped her with her decision-making, and when asked what her experience of working with the VCSW was like, she said:

> The fact that there was someone to actually help me decide, because I wouldn't have been able to do that on my own.

This extract reflected some appreciation and gratitude for having been supported by the VCSW. During the third interview with Laura, her relationship with the VCSW became more apparent. When she was asked what she would miss about JR-PRU when she had left, she said:

> [name of VCSW] because I love [name of VCSW].

When asked what it was about the VCSW that made her so fond of her, Laura replied:

> Everything. Everything. Absolutely everything. I just get on so well with her.

Whilst not explicitly mentioned, it was clear that the relationship that the young people had with the VCSW helped them to feel safe and secure in the decisions they made.

*4.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Post-16 support is informal and always available*

The majority of student participants spoke about the informality of the support available at the PRU, and the fact that the support regarding post-16 choices was always available. It became apparent that these frequent informal conversations were helpful for Marc to feel that he was supported through

every step of the way. During the second interview with Marc, he explained how his first meeting with the VCSW regarding next steps came about:

> ...in this particular lesson I had finished what I had to do so I didn't really have any work, so I was given the choice to talk to [name of VCSW] about options after school or just read a book.

The informality of the support, especially that which is provided by the VCSW also became evident during this interview:

> Well, she [VCSW] normally takes us for Drama Studies, that's once a week, so she normally spends five, 10 minutes catching up with me, seeing if anything's happened. (Marc)

During the third interview with Marc he explained that some time beforehand he had been close to making a final decision but wanted to speak to the VCSW again about this, which he was able to do:

> Yeah and also like I had another like two periods with [VCSW] where she just went through with me and was like, showed me the different option which was if you want to become an accountant this is good; this will help you, so yeah...

The fact that careers advice and guidance was offered by the VCSW whenever the students needed it appeared to result in decision-making being

a more emotionally contained experience for these young people. This seemed to enable them to make informed decisions over time rather than feel pressurised into making potentially incorrect decisions for their future.

Other participants also made it clear that it was possible to speak to the VCSW whenever a young person felt the need to:

> There aren't set times but if I'm like, "[VCSW] I want to apply to another college", she'll be like, "Alright, we'll arrange a time". (Laura)

> I was going to talk to [VCSW] about that to see whether we can postpone it a little bit. (Martin, talking about the possibility of postponing applying for college)

For Martin to feel supported in decision-making, it was important for him to be able to ask his question about whether an application to a college could be postponed as soon as possible, reflecting the importance of the support being available when needed, rather than at set times throughout the year.

It also became clear that many helpful conversations often happened in passing, in the corridors of the PRU, further supporting the importance of continuous and informal support in this area:

> It's more just in the corridors, and stuff. (Laura)

This appeared to allow potentially anxiety-provoking conversations to take place in informal and familiar settings, such as the corridors of the PRU, making the process easier to manage for the young people.

Rebecca also benefited from this informal support being available. When she changed her mind to wanting to pursue a career as a make-up artist, she was asked what her first step was:

> I spoke to [VCSW], who works here; she takes us to college.

Rebecca then explained that she had been able to speak to an adult at the college who interviews young people for the course she wanted to apply for. When asked how this was organised, she said:

> We have these plastic heads at college, and I was just plaiting the hair and then she just walked in and [VCSW] said, “Oh, she does the make-up part of the course, she’s like the head of it”, and she introduced me.

The VCSW had clearly supported Rebecca, introducing her to a relevant adult within the college where Rebecca was thinking to apply, showing that the support was available whenever it was needed. Furthermore, during the third interview with Rebecca, by which time she had changed her mind back to wanting to become a primary school teacher, it was clear that the continual support available at JR-PRU had supported her through the difficult process.

This also related to the issue of external careers guidance being judged ineffective for various reasons, including those mentioned by the head teacher (see above), but also including the timeliness of the advice, and the importance of it being continuous, rather than a one-off meeting with a young person:

> It wasn't helpful, because then I didn't know what I wanted to do, but now I do. (Emma)

> I had the careers advisor from my old school come in. That wasn't really helpful because I was like I really don't want to apply anywhere else because they are all just far away and I just want to go to art college [...] She just handed me a load of books like for [name of college] and made me go through it, and she was like, "Don't you want to do any of these?" and I was like, "No." (Laura)

Conversely, however, one student who was particularly disaffected with education and with JR-PRU said that she found the external careers advice helpful:

> They know... someone who works there does career things, so she has this book thing and she says, "Are you interested in this?", and you say on a scale of one to 10. She reads from it and gives you opportunities on like what you can do, what apprenticeships there are

available for you to do and all that. And like, she does that, so that was good, we sat down... (Chantelle, speaking about external careers advice that was offered in an alternative provision she attended for two days each week)

*4.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Next steps are always on the agenda of staff*

An initiative in place within JR-PRU that appeared to help students to make decisions was the fact that post-16 choices were always on the agenda of the head teacher, VCSW and the teaching staff. This began when the young people were in Year 10, or as soon as they arrived at the PRU if they arrived in Years 10 or 11:

> ...as part of the induction programme, [VCSW] has a session with them. Depending on where they are in Year 10 or Year 11, that induction session with [VCSW] might just be a very low key, getting to know you chat, or it might be, "Okay, we need to look at colleges now because it's January", or you know. So they'd have that initial session with her as part of induction... (head teacher)

> So, what happens is, whenever I get a new student in key stage 4, at the point at which I meet them here and we do the induction interview, one of the things I always ask them then is what might they like to do, so it's part of the initial paperwork. I always ask them what are they interested in. Some have some clear ideas and some don't have any ideas, but I do try to push them to consider it, because what I'm saying

> to them is actually, that's almost the purpose of them being here, it's to get there, so it's important to know. And if they really don't know, I say to them, "Well that's one of the things we're here to help you with because you need to make some plans. You can always change them, but you need to have at least one idea so that you have an idea of what you're working towards. (head teacher)

As well as during induction and/or when students reached Year 10, post-16 choices were also a focus of reviews that took place half-termly. These were meetings held by the student's tutor and attended by the student and their parent/carer, as well as other professionals if necessary. Some reasons for having a regular focus on post-16 choices during these reviews were also made clear:

> At every review there is a report from every subject teacher, there's attendance, there's other bits of data, but there's always a section that says 'Post-16 Plans', so at every review that is discussed. Now, depending on where we are in the two years will depend on how concrete that discussion is, so it might be that they're thinking of doing this, we might try and get them a work experience one day a week because that would help, or it might be 'has applied to [name of college] Level 2', 'has applied to...', or '[VCSW] is going to help to...'. So, the plans become more concrete as the period of time goes on. (head teacher)

One student participant mentioned the half-termly reviews and the relation they had with post-16 choices:

> It's you, your tutor and your parents and every teacher gives a couple of comments on a sheet of paper [...] Yeah, one of my targets was about deciding what to do next year. (Laura)

Laura's quote showed that there were clear systems in place within JR-PRU that ensured there was a continuous focus on post-16 choices and supporting the students to make informed decisions about what to do when they left the PRU at the end of Year 11. Participants also explained how the VCSW prompted them to think about their future careers in the first place, further reinforcing this being on the agenda of staff at JR-PRU:

> ...but when it came to [VCSW] asking me about what I wanted to do for college, it got me thinking [...] Yeah. I was talking to [VCSW] and she was asking me about what I want to do, and I came to realise I'm in Year 11, I need to start thinking about what I want to do. (Marc)

> We talked about, like, my options, what I could do [...] and it was obviously helpful because now I've decided what I want to do. (Emma)

> I went with her and sat on a computer and she was like, "So, what are you thinking about doing?' I was like, "[name of college]" and then we filled in the application. (Laura)

### 4.5 Chapter summary

Three main themes were identified in the interview data in relation to research question one: 'How do young people at a PRU make decisions about moving on after key stage 4 education?', namely 'practicalities', 'building on experience' and 'support'. This chapter presented evidence in the form of extracts from the child and adult participants' interviews in relation to these three themes, which explored how the young people made decisions about what to do when they leave JR-PRU after completing their final GCSE exams. Further interpretation and discussion of these findings is presented in Chapter six.

# Chapter 5: How did the context help?

## 5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents research findings regarding how the particular context of JR-PRU helped the participants to make decisions that were likely to lead to successful destinations. The themes identified from the interviews are presented in relation to:

**Research question two:** What contextual factors support these young people to make decisions that are likely to be successful, allowing them to move forward?

Five themes were identified in relation to this research question: 'importance of the particular environment', 'structures in place at JR-PRU that support moving on after key stage 4 education', 'influences', 'confidence in ability to reach goals' and 'pressure'. These themes and their identified associated sub-themes are shown below in Table 6, followed by a thematic map showing this information in Figure 2.

**Table 6: Themes identified in relation to research question two**

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|---|
| **4. The unique environment** | 4.1 Students feel cared about at the PRU<br>4.2 The importance of the VCSW |
| **5. Structures in place at JR-PRU that support moving on after key** | 5.1 Personalised curriculum<br>5.2 Opportunities to experience college |

| | |
|---|---|
| **stage 4 education** | and world of work<br>5.3 Experiential support |
| **6. Influences** | 6.1 Family<br>6.2 Friends |
| **7. Confidence in ability to reach goals** | |
| **8. Pressure** | 8.1 Factors that reduce young people's sense of pressure at JR-PRU<br>8.2 Importance of not feeling pressured when making decisions |

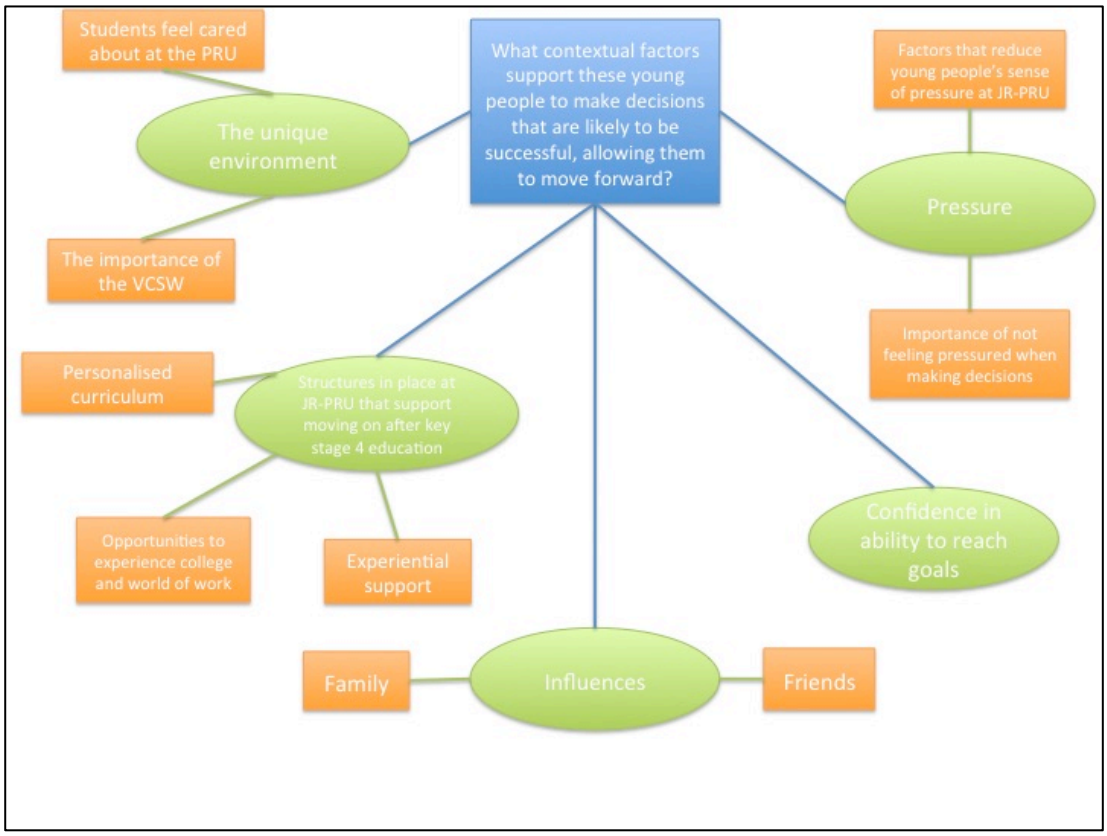


**Figure 2. Thematic map showing themes identified in relation to research question two.**

## 5.2 Theme 4: The unique environment

### *5.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Students feel cared about at the PRU*

JR-PRU appeared to put a great deal of importance on post-16 choices, and as such provided support to its students in relation to this. The data suggested that it was considered important that the young people who attended JR-PRU felt cared about by staff who worked there in order for this support to be accepted and valued, and this was identified as a sub-theme within the data.

There was a perception from some participants that the staff at JR-PRU were more caring than staff they had met in their previous mainstream schools:

> Here it feels a lot more like the caringness and the generosity and niceness feels a lot more genuine here than it does in mainstream school. (Marc)

> I think it's because I'm so close to teachers, I feel like I can speak to them about anything. I like to have their opinion on things, so I'd always go to them if I needed reassuring because they know what they're doing and how to speak to me. I would not go near any teachers at [name of previous mainstream school]. (Rebecca)

This was further reinforced by Marc:

> ...because teachers at mainstream are really pushy because some of them get paid on what marks you get, and they're paid to be nice. But here, obviously they get paid, but it's their choice, they know the kids they're working with have issues so they're genuinely nice people, and they're not just putting it on as an act.

This may have been a contributing factor to a perception that mainstream staff cared less about the emotional wellbeing of the students:

> I remember when I was in [name of previous mainstream school] if something was late, I remember when I was going through a bad time and I kept getting kids coming up to me, or my teacher, saying, "Look, Marc, we need your essay in right now. You have no more time." (Marc)

Interview data suggested that it was important for students to feel cared about, and the nurturing environment of JR-PRU appeared to provide them with a containing, safe space, allowing them to feel as though they could relax more and spend more time thinking about their education.

### *5.2.2 Sub-theme 2: The importance of the VCSW*

This sub-theme explores the role of the VCSW, and the importance of this role within JR-PRU. During the interview with the head teacher, she was asked how the role of VCSW was created:

> We were expanding our provision and finding that there was a bit that was needed to be done... it wasn't really a teacher's role, but it needed to be very flexible, so we kind of created this job, really, we just made it up, thinking around supporting students in work experience placements, going to college with them, because before I arrived the students had always gone on these college placements but there was a very poor retention rate. They'd go for a few weeks and normally get thrown off the course for bad behaviour [...] they'd fall out with the lecturer, tell them where they could go and then the college would be like... you know, that was the pattern. So when I arrived I really wanted that to be successful, because I realised that if they couldn't be successful one day a week, how were they going to be successful five days a week? And actually all that was doing was giving them a very negative view of themselves and actually, "Well it didn't work, did it, so I can't go to college, I can't do that". So that's actually where that started from, me thinking that they need support and someone has to go with them that understands them and can support them there...

Through completing the type of work described by the head teacher, and through the VCSW's previous experience, she appeared to become knowledgeable about post-16 options in the local area. She also appeared to get to know the students well, which seemed to result in her being well placed to provide careers guidance. Young people were often prompted to consider future careers at the point at which the VCSW became involved,

and it also appeared to be important for her to keep other members of staff in JR-PRU up to date with the young people's choices so that others could support them more effectively:

> ...and obviously because the teachers all speak to each other, like [name of VCSW] probably told the teachers, "Oh, Marc applied for this, oh, Marc went for his interview", so the day after my interview the teachers were asking, "Oh, how did it go? Did it go well?", so it feels more like friends than teachers. (Marc)

Marc found the effective communication between the VCSW and other members of staff to be very supportive and further added to his feeling that the staff at JR-PRU cared genuinely about his future.

The fact that the VCSW was aware of the processes that the students must have gone through to make and finalise a choice regarding post-16 education and training was reported as something participants appreciated:

> She knew what application form I had to fill out and she knew what I had to do and when I had to do it. (Laura)

> Yeah and also, like, I had another like two periods with [name of VCSW] where she just went through with me and was like, showed me the different option which was if you want to become an accountant this is good; this will help you, so yeah... (Marc)

One participant, however, wanted to move on to something very particular, the process for which was unfamiliar to the VCSW. When asked if he was aware of the support that was available at the PRU, Martin responded:

> With certain courses, yeah, but around football, not really [...] there's not anyone in school who really focuses on football.

Despite this the VCSW appeared to be the first person to approach for Martin, as well as others, when unsure of what to do or if they needed support with applying for next steps:

> Yeah, if I don't get onto that I'll speak to [name of VCSW]. (Martin)

> I think I just need to think about what I want to do, and talk to [name of VCSW]. (Emma)

> I definitely want to have a career, so I should just speak to [name of VCSW]. (Chantelle)

It was clear that the VCSW was most of the participants' first point of contact when they were in need of some advice and guidance. However, other participants mentioned other members of staff who provided them with the advice and guidance they needed:

> No. I will speak to [name of deputy head teacher]. [...] She helps me the most. (Paul)

The VCSW appeared to be vital in supporting the participants to complete application forms, for which gratitude was reported during the interviews:

> I went with her and sat on a computer and she was like, “So, what are you thinking about doing?”, I was like “[name of college]”, and then we filled in the application. (Laura)

> Yeah, and [name of VCSW] helped me to apply for the college [...] she helped me fill out the application form which I found really useful and I think I would’ve struggled with the form quite a bit without her. (Martin)

> Getting me into college, [name of VCSW] did, we sat together and applied. (Paul)

The majority of the student participants named the VCSW as being influential in helping them make decisions, for example:

> I’d say [name of VCSW] because the things that I do and the activities that I enjoy, and working with money, the more I talked about it with [name of VCSW], the more I figured it fits in with the whole accountancy concept. (Marc)

## 5.3 Theme 5: Structures in place at JR-PRU that support moving on after key stage 4 education

As described in chapter four, the head teacher of JR-PRU reported that a main aim of the PRU was to prepare the students for moving on to post-16 education or training. Many of the structures in place to support this transition from a small, nurturing environment to potentially a much larger one, were also mentioned by the young people during the interviews.

### *5.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Personalised curriculum*

A personalised curriculum that supported the development of the young people's decision-making was reported by participants to be a helpful structure. Two ways of providing a personalised curriculum were described by the adult participants:

> ...if they say to me, "Oh, I really want to do Hair and Beauty, I've always wanted to be a hairdresser", I will then say, "Okay, well perhaps you could do our college course, there's a one day a week college course". (head teacher)

> For instance, one of the new lads was doing Business Studies and Geography at school, so we brought in a teacher to do Business Studies, and [name of staff member] is now doing Geography with him. [...] Oh, we've got another lad who has Spanish lessons. Last year we had a girl who did Portuguese. She got an A for GCSE Portuguese, so... [...] Well, the music teacher comes from [name of

> secondary school in the borough], so we pay the school to let them come out and work with us. We'll do anything to help the students... (VCSW)

These extracts showed that staff at JR-PRU appeared to be willing to provide individualised support to their students to complete GCSE courses in subject areas that were of genuine interest to them, providing more opportunities for them to experience success in this vital stage of their education.

Another way of providing a personalised curriculum was described by some of the student participants:

> I've started talking to the PE teacher about it and got a better understanding of it. His mate plays football. (Martin, talking about skills needed to improve his ability in football for a trial related to his apprenticeship)

> In Maths, because obviously what I want to do involves maths, so my Maths teacher's like, "Oh, well this will really help, like, if you become an accountant, you'll be using things like this." [...] In Science [name of Teacher] has kind of been... If it's just me in the lesson he's focused mainly on Physics because obviously that's what I need for... (Marc)

An important factor here appeared to be that the teachers at JR-PRU targeted their lessons to suit the post-16 choices that individual students had made.

*5.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Opportunities to experience college and the world of work*

Other structures reported by participants that JR-PRU had put in place to help prepare the students included engaging with another provision, such as college, and regular and flexible work experience. The adult participants explained the rationale and importance of this:

> It was about how we try to make sure that every Year 11 has an experience outside of JR-PRU. It's really about that anxiety about moving on. We try to make sure that every student, during the course of Year 11, will have some other experience in another place other than here. So it could be a work experience placement, one day a week, just for six weeks, maybe, or for longer if they enjoy it, or something else like a college placement, or some other provision. I think that's really, really important, because we have seen how it can be very cozy here, very comfortable, very secure, and actually if that's all we do, the move away from us can be really, really difficult. (head teacher)

> Yeah, we like them to go out in the big wide world. Only one day a week, but we like them to experience that before they go. (VCSW)

Experiences, such as those mentioned by the adult participants, appeared to be helping the young people to prepare for leaving JR-PRU in various ways. For example, Rebecca spoke about how attending a college one day per week helped her to think about, and feel more comfortable with, moving on:

> I already go to [name of college] on a Friday, so I know what type of people are there.
>
> Oh yeah, definitely, because it's down the road, I know where I'm going, and I know the teachers now, so yeah.
>
> And then I spoke to somebody at the college who's actually interviewing me next week, and I didn't realise, and I showed her my pictures and she said, "Yeah, apply, you need to get in there."

Regular, flexible work experience was also referred to as being helpful by the young people. The staff at the PRU were often able to find relevant work experience to the young people's interests and future plans, as described by Marc:

> I also got a work experience placement at [name of bank], just to get an idea of how it works, and how they manage accounts and stuff, because obviously if I want to do accounting I need to start thinking about the environment, etcetera etcetera.

Work experience was generally enjoyed:

> Yeah, it went well and it was really fun. (Marc)

Chantelle had mixed feelings about work experience, however. During the second interview with her, she explained how she felt that she had been asked to engage with too many different work experience opportunities:

> I don't want to do work experience because I've done so many work experiences since I've been here and I've told them I don't like it because I don't like being put on the spot where I have to go and start somewhere new and I've done so many things.

This frustration verbalised by Chantelle may have been a reflection of her uncertainty of what she wanted to do in the future. It seemed as though, whilst staff at JR-PRU had been trying to be supportive by finding her many different types of work experience, Chantelle may have found this to be too anxiety provoking to take full advantage of.

Despite the support available at JR-PRU, by the time the third wave of interviews had come around Chantelle had become further disengaged from education for various reasons, and was supported to engage with an alternative provision which, although not officially linked to JR-PRU, was provided with support by JR-PRU in various forms, such as child protection

matters, and so they worked together. Due to Chantelle being unsure about what she wanted to do after completing her GCSEs, the alternative provision provided her with some insightful experiences in the form of supported work experience that she found helpful, for example:

> ...we went to a school, and I don't even like little kids but I had to work with these kids and, like, teach them things, and I think, I don't know, it's just strange that you can get little kids to actually listen to you, and I think that's cool, like the way they respond to you and all that. I thought it was quite good, like I was with this little boy... you're meant to work with them all but he was just like, "Can you work with me?" and obviously if I'm going to work with him I'm going to make sure his work's the best, because I didn't want it to look rubbish. And I was doing that and it was actually fun, he like was telling me about himself and all that, and he was only seven. And I've got seven year-old cousins and I hate them, but when I was there he was calm and everything. It's good, I think sometimes they give you things to see the bigger outside world or the other jobs you could do, like I never thought I'd do teaching but that's... it was alright.

The alternative provision had provided Chantelle with a positive work experience that had encouraged her to continue thinking about her future.

Work experience allowed for Marc to be able to gain a deeper understanding of the field that he was interested in, and it also showed him the aspects of

the career that he did not enjoy, enabling him to make a more informed decision:

> It kind of turned me away from the face-to-face customer dealing side of banking because when I was down in the banking hall I had a work experience badge and, like, some of the people you get there who are really rude, like some of the customers. I got told to F-off by one of them because I couldn't help. I was like, "Oh, I'm only on work experience", and she walked off and muttered under her breath but it's like... so that kind of put me off working in the banking halls and stuff.

This provided Marc with an unpleasant, yet real experience in the world of work. Marc also explained that engaging with work experience in this way helped to keep him motivated with his chosen career path.

*5.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Experiential support*

Another way in which the alternative provision was reported to help young people was by organising for professionals to speak to them about their careers:

> I think she's given me a lot of opportunities, like she's brought me loads of people in to come talk to me. Like I used to want to go in the army, I'm debating that now. She brought in an army man for me and I spoke to him, and she said she's going to bring a make-up artist in and work with her [...] Yeah, it was helpful because he did say stick in

> school at 16, because if I was going to go, then I would have already applied now, because you can. But he's like, "I advise you to get an education first", because he said not many people want to stay in after the two years and they find it hard to get a job with no qualifications. So he said, "I advise you to stay in school." (Chantelle)

This provided Chantelle with some helpful insights from someone who had already done what she was considering, and this encouraged her to choose to continue with education after leaving JR-PRU.

Marc explained how providing Year 11 students with the choice to leave the site of JR-PRU at lunch times was an important structure that supported independence that would be required after leaving at the end of key stage 4:

> Year 11s are allowed out at lunch. It's quite a big privilege because if you don't come back by this time you can't come back into school. It's your choice, they give you more responsibility [...] and it also gets you ready for work, so we'll be up the shops and it'll be five-to and we'll be like, "Alright, come on, we need to walk back now." It kind of helps you manage your time.

Theme 5 above describes how the PRU focused on preparing its students for leaving its small, nurturing environment to move on into the world of further education and training.

## 5.4 Theme 6: Influences

### *5.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Family*

All student participants mentioned family when thinking about who had been influential in their decision-making process. For some it was through their parent and carer talking to them about what could happen if they did not apply for a college placement, and the importance of overcoming their anxieties to do so:

> I'd say my mum and my nan. They've both said, like, "You're going to be just, like, stuck in the future if you don't..." Because obviously... because I get scared, like nervous, but they were like, "You're going to come across so many more harder things in life than applying for a college", and I actually thought about it and I was like, yeah, true. (Chantelle)

Chantelle did not always feel that the staff at JR-PRU understood her anxieties, and so this extract reflected the importance of advice from her family, which she was able to accept and consider.

For other participants, the influence manifested itself in wanting to follow in the footsteps of specific family members:

> ...and also my mum. Well, my mum in the fact that she does it, so it's influenced what I want to do. (Marc)

> I don't know, because I kind of want to do everything my mum used to do. She did the army training and she really enjoyed it, and I like the idea of jumping out of aeroplanes and things like that, because I really like to risk my life because it looks really fun. (Chantelle)

Conversely, some participants explained that they did not want to follow in the footsteps of family members, which also influenced their decision-making:

> Definitely my mum, because she turned her life around and I don't want to end up having to go back to college at 40... (Rebecca)

Finally, for some it had been the continual support and advice from family members that influenced their decision-making:

> My dad got me into football [...] My dad's just taken me to football trials and that, and always been there. (Martin)

> My mum. My mum's always been my go to and she's always helping me with what I should do and what I shouldn't do. (Rebecca)

*5.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Friends*

The majority of the student participants also identified their friends as influential in their decision-making. Sometimes participants had been influenced by the fact that their friend(s) had made and acted on a decision:

> My mates as well, because they're like, "Oh yeah, I applied for college", so I'm like okay I'll apply for college then. (Laura)

> Probably a few of my mates. My influences have been my friends, my mates [...] my mate is currently doing it, so I got in touch with [name of college] and applied. (Martin)

> I'm actually talking to some boy who goes there and he's like, "You can't not go to college." He's like, "You can't just..." Yeah, it was weird, and then obviously like I've talked to all my friends and everything, and they're all like, "No, I'm going into college or get an apprenticeship", and I just kind of look like the idiot standing there lost, not knowing what to do. So I thought if I get myself into college like Health and Social Care, I don't know, that will be alright. (Chantelle)

Chantelle was clearly influenced by not wanting to be the only one in her friendship group who would not go on to attend a college after leaving the PRU.

One participant had been influenced by her friend to focus on education and work hard at JR-PRU, and was also influenced by having similar ideas of what each other wanted to do when leaving the PRU:

> So I've really become close with [name of friend], and she's like me, we don't get in trouble; we don't come here to get in trouble, we're just calm and normal and don't fight and don't do this and that, so she's had a good influence on me as well, making me work better and harder [...] and also she was going to do the course with me, because that's what she wanted to do at the time. (Rebecca)

### 5.5 Theme 7: Confidence in ability to reach goals

The young people's confidence in their ability to reach their goals was identified as a factor that helped the young people to make decisions. The student participants showed confidence in reaching their goals, such as passing their GCSEs and reaching their longer-term goals.

Students were asked, 'On a scale of zero to 10, how likely do you feel it is that you will get the GCSE grades that you need to reach your goal for next year?' Table 7 below shows the responses that were given:

**Table 7: Student participants' perceived likelihood of achieving necessary GCSE grades to move on to chosen path**

| Participant | Perceived likelihood of achieving necessary GCSE grades |
|---|---|
| Marc | 8 or 9 |
| Laura | 7 or 8 |
| Rebecca | 8 or 9 |
| Paul | 7 |
| Emma | 8 |
| Martin | 8 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Chantelle | 6 |

When asked why, some examples of the young people's responses were:

> Because I've... being here I've done so much more work and I'm more excited to do it and to get it done and it's not... it doesn't feel like a chore. (Rebecca)

> The only grade I'm kind of skeptical I'll get on is Science one but other than that I think if I do, do the studying I will get a B in my Maths and I will get a B in my English, but just because the Science exams are like you get one GCSE for all of it, so it's kind of like you need to do well in all of them. So hopefully I'll get a B in Physics, a B in Chemistry, and Biology is my weakest one and so I'll probably get a C in Biology. (Marc)

Both of the adult participants expressed their feelings that supporting the young people at JR-PRU to be more confident was an important part of their role:

> I think working out ways of helping the students to be more confident, which is not just the explicit confidence to go onto the next step, but being confident in themselves and what they do; finding other ways to do that... (head teacher)

> It's definitely about building up that relationship with them, listening, showing an interest in them, because some of them come from mainstream and they're "rubbish" and "can't do anything". Well actually, you're not rubbish, you can do something. (VCSW)

Through talking to the young people, it would appear that the importance placed on building confidence was evident and appreciated. Rebecca spoke about how the staff at JR-PRU helped to build her confidence and the impact that this had:

> I think all the people telling me how good I was, and I didn't realise [...] I can learn so much more in them lessons now that I know I'm going to be able to pass now, whereas I never thought I would ever, ever pass my exams in [name of previous secondary mainstream school], and now I'm here I know 100 per cent I can get my C or my D to get into my course that I want to do and move on with life.

Chantelle felt that her confidence had improved significantly since attending JR-PRU, and appeared to link that to an improvement in her grades. During Wave one of interviews, she explained that she did not feel as though she was a confident person but that the PRU was helping:

> ...and it's uncomfortable, and I don't show it, like I show I'm quite a confident person but I'm not.

> I'd say I'm more confident in school. When I first come here I was really quiet, but now I've come out myself more and I feel like I can be myself more here, but outside I'd say I'm still... yeah.

During Wave two, Chantelle expressed her desire to become more confident:

> Yeah, I'm excited because I hope that I can come out to be more confident and have a really good job. Not sure what job yet, but I am excited.

And finally, the last time I interviewed Chantelle she explained how she felt that her confidence, and her grades, had increased:

> My confidence has got well better since I've been in here, and so obviously my grades as well, they're getting good so that's a better thing.

She went on to explain the positive effect that this had had on her life, including her ability to begin a conversation with me, which she felt she would not have been confident enough to do at one point:

> I won't always get embarrassed or... I don't want to say nervous, but do you know what I mean, like... If someone comes in I'll be like, "Oh, hi". Like, do you know when you was in there, did I speak to you first? I wouldn't never have done that if I was not confident, so I probably

> would've just ignored you and walked away. But whereas now I just feel like I can talk to more people and be more confident around my friends, and be myself.

When asked what she felt had helped her to do this, she explained:

> I just think it's the people here. I feel like you're not going to get judged or anything in this school, so you can literally be yourself in here [...] so I just think that's improved my confidence.

Chantelle was an example of a young person who experienced a great deal of anxiety on a regular basis, but who had been supported to feel increasingly confident during her time at JR-PRU. The extracts clearly show how appreciative she was of the staff at the PRU for this, and the more positive future implications are evident.

The importance of building confidence for college interviews was also mentioned by two participants. One spoke about the help that he had already received, and another about the help that she felt she would need when the time came:

> If I have an interview she'll prepare me for it, say "This is what you need to do, this is what you need to take" [...] and also, because I know a couple of students who haven't gone because they don't really

> feel confident enough and they haven't told the teachers, but at least when I tell [VCSW] she can give me ideas. (Marc)

> I think when it comes closer to the time I'm going to need some kind of support in what I'm meant to say and do and look for the interviews. (Rebecca)

### 5.6 Theme 8: Pressure

There was a resounding sense that all student participants did not respond well to pressure being placed upon them at this time in their educational careers. For example:

> ...it's because I get stressed out and when people say, "Just go, you'll be alright", I think you don't know what I'm feeling right now. That really pisses me off when people do that. They're like, "Oh, it's fine, everyone has to do it" but then I'm not everyone, and I'm really nervous right now and I feel like I'm going to have a heart attack so can you stop pressuring me! So yeah... (Chantelle)

Many participants explained what it was about JR-PRU that reduced their sense of pressure, and these will now be explored.

*5.6.1 Sub-theme 1: Factors that reduce young people's sense of pressure at JR-PRU*

Although most student participants implicitly acknowledged an increased sense of pressure in mainstream schools when compared to JR-PRU, one participant acknowledged this explicitly:

> Like in mainstream there was a lot of... even in Year 10 they were like, "Right, come on GCSEs are coming and we've got to get this done." (Marc)

Several factors were identified that appeared to reduce the student participants' sense of pressure at JR-PRU. One of these was supportive teachers:

> I can literally just talk to him about anything and I never felt like that in [name of previous mainstream school] [...] and he will always ask if I'm okay when I see him, or will always smile and say, "If you ever need to talk I'm here". (Rebecca)

> ...and also support from teachers. Whereas in mainstream they'd say, "It's going to be really hard in exams", here it's a lot more... they don't directly put pressure on you. [...] So it's kind of like unless you are really in trouble of not getting good grades, or if you're really slacking, the teachers are kind of... they're very calm about it. (Marc)

Another factor was centred around homework not being compulsory, the rationale for which was explained by the head teacher:

> We don't have formal homework, and what I always explain to the students when they first come, and they look at me a bit strangely, is that students actually get to the point where they ask for it and they want it, and it's true [...] responsibility for their own learning is a key part of our philosophy, so I always explain there's no homework timetable; if you ask for homework the teacher will give it to you, or the teacher may make suggestions, and if you take those suggestions and bring them back that's great, and you do that because you want to get a better grade, or because you're interested in the subject; you don't do it because if you don't you'll get a detention.

Rebecca explained that she asked for homework because of the lack of pressure:

> Yeah. I would never have done that in [name of previous mainstream school], I would literally have been screaming and shouting and going crazy. It's because here homework is not forced on you, it's if I ask for it and if I have my own time to do it, and I give it to you then I feel better about myself. [...] It's because it's not pressured, it's not pressured for homework for... to have five pieces of homework every week... it's not a pressure, it's my time.

The other main factor that reduced young people's sense of pressure at JR-PRU was reported to be the general ethos and the school environment. For example, in conversation with the head teacher, she explained that she and the staff did not call JR-PRU a 'PRU', they called it a 'school', and the main reason for this was to ensure that teachers had high expectations of their students, rather than expecting less than would teachers in a mainstream school. Interestingly, it appeared that staff were also quite aware of the language they used with the students in other scenarios, and this helped some students to feel less pressured. As Marc explained:

> But here they... they don't really speak... They don't really say 'GCSEs', they are normally... they'll be like, "Your exams are coming up" or like "Just try and get ready because...

Similarly with supporting the young people to make decisions about post-16 options, Marc explained that he felt less pressured at the PRU when making decisions:

> Here they take a more friendly approach, so they won't go, "Oh, you've got to do this", they'll go, "Have you thought about what you want to do after you leave here?"

*5.6.2 Sub-theme 2: The importance of not feeling pressured when making decisions*

Several student participants spoke about their avoidance of putting themselves under pressure:

> I've just recently quit my GCSE PE because it was a lot of pressure on me and I couldn't really cope. (Rebecca)

> There was a Level three, but that was like five GCSEs C to A, or like D to A, and I didn't want to do that because then that's a bit too much pressure because at least I know that I'll be able to get the grades [...] so I didn't want to have to put pressure on myself to try to get above a C. (Laura)

When making decisions about post-16 options, Marc explained that it was important to ensure that a relaxed and informed choice was made to avoid making a wrong decision:

> My mum is worried, she'll like, "Oh, we need to do this." But it's like basically like mothers' instinct but I'm kind of just like alright it's fine, like there's no point getting worked up about it because then it's just going to affect my view on it because if I'm really worked up I'll go there and I'll see it and I'll be like, "Yes, yeah I'll do it, I'll do that!" But I want to actually have a proper view on it, would I actually like to do this?

Chantelle explained that when she made a decision to apply for a college course under pressure, she then did not attend the interview because it was not what she felt she actually wanted to do at the time:

> ...like it was so much peer pressure to be like pushed into doing something, and then I didn't even have time to sit down and think what I wanted to do.

When a great deal of pressure was applied to the students in this study regarding decision-making, they did not respond well. Interestingly, however, frequent informal checking-in by a familiar adult was seen as positive pressure for making decisions:

> So she [VCSW] kind of keeps touching in, so it's a lot more pressure but it's friendly, and it's kind of like you're speaking to someone about it which helps. (Marc)

> [VCSW] has kept checking in to make sure I'm still doing that, which has helped me to do it. (Paul)

**5.7 Chapter summary**

Five main themes were identified in the interview data in relation to research question two: 'what contextual factors support these young people to make decisions that are likely to be successful, allowing them to move forward?',

namely ‘the unique environment’, ‘structures in place at JR-PRU that support moving on after key stage 4 education’, ‘influences’, ‘confidence in ability to reach goals’ and ‘pressure’. This chapter presented evidence in the form of extracts from the student and adult participants’ interviews in relation to these five themes, which explored the contextual factors within JR-PRU that supported the young people’s decision-making regarding post-16 choices. Further interpretation and discussion of these findings is presented in Chapter six.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

## 6.1 Introduction and chapter overview

Due to a paucity of longitudinal research on how young people make decisions related to post-16 options, especially in a PRU, this research aimed to explore how young people in such a setting made decisions about their immediate future after completing key stage 4 education, and how they were supported throughout their decision-making process. The perspectives of seven young people, who were in Year 11 at JR-PRU when data collection was completed, were gathered over three time points across three school terms to ensure the process could be captured. Two adults who worked at JR-PRU were also interviewed, mainly to find out more about the context of the PRU. The research questions posited were:

1. How do young people at a PRU make decisions about moving on after key stage 4 education?
2. What contextual factors support these young people to make decisions that are likely to be successful, allowing them to continue to post-16 education?

This chapter considers the findings by exploring the way in which the themes identified in Chapters four and five answer the research questions. The strengths and limitations of the present study are then explored, before considering possible future research in the area. Finally, implications for

educational psychologists are considered and recommendations for LAs and educational settings are made based on the findings.

## 6.2 Strengths and uniqueness of the current study

### *6.2.1 Theoretical contribution*

The findings of the present study address the lack of research available regarding how young people make decisions about post-16 options, and provide unique and insightful information regarding the process within a PRU setting. Additionally, this research provides an example of the way in which a PRU supports its students to make appropriate and realistic decisions that are likely to be fruitful and result in a successful destination based on the positive destination data provided by JRP-PRU.

The longitudinal nature of the present research allowed for the iterative process of decision-making to be captured. This highlighted two key factors. It is vital for young people in a PRU in Years 10 and 11 to be supported in their decision-making by a familiar adult who is available throughout the year, rather than seeing an external careers adviser once or twice who is unfamiliar to the young people. This appeared to provide the students with more time to explore their options, providing them with a supported 'psychosocial moratorium' (Erikson, 1968) at a time in their development when their self-concept was likely to be unstable (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1996; Rutter & Rutter, 1992) and theory suggests that they would have been experiencing role confusion (Erikson, 1968). Also, the importance of a longitudinal design when exploring decision-making processes is highlighted

to enable more thorough data that truly captures the process, including participants' feelings, challenges faced, and changes made to their decisions.

The worth of informal support regarding FE and training options was identified in the current study, also implicitly suggesting an underlying established relationship. This was central to creating a more containing experience when discussing the subject of the young people's futures, and further relates to the importance of vulnerable young people being supported in their decision-making process by a familiar adult over time, once again mitigating against ideas put forward by Erikson (1968), that in adolescence the self-concept is unstable, as well as research showing that adolescent decision-making is suboptimal (Arnett, 1999; Casey, Getz & Galvan, 2008; Steinberg et al., 2008).

Mechanisms to ensure that the young people's futures were always on the agenda of staff and frequently discussed with students, such as a focus on their future during the induction process, were identified as supportive structures in relation to decision-making, creating a context in which next steps were able to be discussed informally throughout Years 10 and 11. Additionally, the VCSW understood the necessary practical processes required and communicated with teachers to keep them updated about the young people's goals, which also made it possible for the support to be informal due to decisions being more likely to be made earlier in the year, avoiding pressurised decision-making. This allowed JR-PRU to avoid relying

on the patchy and poor external careers guidance currently available in schools (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2015b; Ofsted, 2013).

Some of the decisions made were related to the young people in the current study having experienced subjects that are not always available in mainstream secondary schools, such as Hair and Beauty and Mechanics. This highlights the significance of more vocational subjects being available in mainstream schools, as many would benefit, including those who are likely to become disengaged from mainstream education. It appears that this has already been planned by the DfE in the form of the headline measure 'Progress 8' for the new secondary school accountability system whereby three non-GCSE qualifications will be included such as vocational subjects in areas including child development and wellbeing, and Engineering (DfE, 2014d; DfE, 2016c). The plan is for this to be implemented towards the end of 2016. There is also a possibility that this would allow for more students to be successfully reintegrated into mainstream schools following time at a PRU, the difficulty for this age group of which has been shown (OCC, 2012; Parsons & Howlett, 2000b).

Another important finding of the current study was the negative effect that pressure had on decision-making related to post-16 options. Bruine de Bruin (2012) asserted that "adolescents face many important decisions, often for the first time in their lives" (p. 85), and Year 11 is already a very stressful year for most adolescents, having to complete the most challenging exams of their lives to date whilst thinking about what they would like to do in their

longer-term future to enable them to make appropriate shorter-term choices. The finding of the current study suggests that the young people appreciated staff at the PRU avoiding applying them with extra pressure during this time.

The process by which parents influence choices is relatively unknown (Dietrich et al., 2012). Whilst questions specifically related to this were not included in the interview schedules for the present study, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for this to be explored to some extent. The way in which parents were influential to participants in the current study varied, and included supporting the young people to overcome their anxieties and encouraging them, as well as being influenced by the choices their parents had made in the past.

### *6.2.2 Methodological strengths*

This study took place in a PRU and focused on a vulnerable and hard-to-reach sample of young people who were provided with opportunities for their voices to be heard, the importance of which has been asserted by various researchers (Allan, 2011; Knipe et al., 2008; Wise & Upton, 1998). Furthermore, the longitudinal design provided a unique exploration of how the sample made decisions over time about their future, reinforcing the belief that these decisions are the manifestations of various smaller decisions that gradually commit the young person to a final choice, reinforcing that decisions are not constant or predictable, and they develop over time (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001).

Of the seven student participants, four were female. This does not reflect the DfE (2015c) data, which show that almost 70% of young people attending PRUs in England are male; however despite the current sample being small, the present study has obtained the views of an under-represented cohort of young people, which is a great strength. All seven student participants were interviewed three times over the eight month period with no attrition, which added to the rigour of the research. Interviewing the two adults was helpful to further provide a sense of context, as well as allowing for the research to include their perspectives and be used as a comparison to the student participants' where appropriate.

### 6.3 Research Question One: How do young people at a PRU make decisions about moving on after key stage 4 education?

The distance between participants' homes and potential institution for further education or training, and so the time it would take them to travel there and back, was important when deciding on where to go upon leaving JR-PRU. Some young people chose an institution based on it being close to where they lived, others settled for a subject area due to it being available at their closest institution, and for others proximity was a worry when thinking about leaving JR-PRU and moving on to post-16 education and/or training, making them feel anxious and unsettled about their decision. Proximity could be seen as a 'situational constraint', and the finding lends some support for Brandtstädter and Rothermund (2002), who suggested that people adjust their goals, through assimilation and accommodation, to given situational constraints. Hodgson and Spours (2012) also note that complicated journeys

can decrease motivation to study and affect successful completion of post-16 courses, suggesting that young people consider the geographical locations of their options when making decisions.

This finding also supports Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001), who asserted that it is incorrect to assume that all young people carefully evaluate each appropriate option and choose the one that will secure their goal. They concluded that there is little evidence that suggests people end up with the most rational or optimum solution.

Money was a central factor when making decisions about next steps for the young people, relating to the theme of 'money matters'. For some participants the importance was related to a longer-term goal, such as earning a considerable salary in the future. For others, the goal was more immediate or medium-term, such as wanting to earn money whilst they learned by completing an apprenticeship, or avoiding an option that would likely result in them going to university and incurring debt through a student loan which represents a further situational constraint (Brandstädter and Rothermund, 2002).

Hemsley-Brown (1999) asserted that the decision-making process is complex and interactive, and is influenced by various factors. The present study found that, whilst financial implications were considered a situational constraint (Brandstädter and Rothermund, 2002), choices were not made independently of other factors, such as the enjoyment the participants felt for

the subjects, which was often realised through the wider curriculum offered by JR-PRU.

Participants tended to base much of their decision-making to enter into a particular field on subjects they had already experienced and enjoyed. Whilst the findings of the current research did not prove or disprove the multi-staged process model posited by White (2007) regarding how students make decisions within compulsory education, elements of this model appear relevant. For example, referring to students in Year 9 making choices related to key stage 4 options, White (2007) explained that the majority were 'inclusive' in nature due to the young people choosing subjects in which they performed well or which they enjoyed. A difference between these two studies, however, was the context of 'compulsory education'. Participants in White's (2007) research were making decisions regarding non-compulsory education, whereas due to the rise in participation age participants in the current study were making decisions regarding compulsory education and training.

It was evident in the current study that others' perceptions of students' strengths were deemed to be significantly influential. These related mainly to those of adults including staff at JR-PRU and the participants' family members with whom a positive relationship was experienced. For example, Rebecca's relationship with staff at JR-PRU encouraged her to become more aware of her strengths which resulted in a confidence to pursue a career that she had desired for a long time despite her own negative self-perceptions

and fears. This finding supports Dyke et al. (2008), who asserted that the greatest impact on decision-making is related to having built strong relationships with students and connecting with their lived experiences. The finding also raises the importance of effective and personalised, CEIAG.

The current research captured Rebecca's journey, which had seemingly been affected at one stage by an unstable self-concept and a negative self-belief, as may be expected in adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1996; Rutter & Rutter, 1992), that she would not be able to meet the necessary requirements to become a teacher in the future. It could be argued that her positive relationship with staff provided her with a psychosocial moratorium (Erikson, 1968), allowing her the time and space to explore her possibilities and to encourage a firmer sense of identity. Additionally, during Wave Two of interviews, Rebecca's doubts could be described as being influenced by an 'impossible self' (Markus & Nurius, 1987). Seemingly due to the positive relationship Rebecca had with staff, she was able to turn this impossible self into a positive future self, separating her from the participants in Mainwaring and Hallam's (2010) research who were from a PRU context.

The significance of an established relationship between adults in JR-PRU and students was mentioned by both adult and student participants in the present study, and it was clear that this was especially necessary in such an environment due to the SEMH needs of the young people attending who often experienced anxiety about talking to unfamiliar adults. The findings of the current research suggest that external advice is not received positively

and it is vital to provide accessible and personalised advice to increase the likelihood of successful transitions and lower the chances of young people making poor decisions and dropping out of FE placements (Evans et al., 2010; Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Martinez & Munday, 1998; McCrone & Filmer-Sankey, 2012; Ofsted, 2013). This is inconsistent with Mangan et al. (2001), who showed that when making decisions, 52% of their sample spoke to a careers teacher, and 63% spoke to a careers adviser, suggesting a significance of these roles in supporting young people to make decisions.

An argument made by the findings of the current study is that external careers advice appears to be unhelpful, and, as explained by the head teacher, often causes more confusion for the young people who receive it. Support here is shown for Kidd and Wardman's research (1999), which found that after guidance was received from a careers adviser, students did not feel that their decision-making had advanced, and also felt that other options were not fully explored. When criticising external careers guidance, the participants in Kidd and Wardman's (1999) study explained that the adviser tended to merely respond to the young people's aims as explained by them, without asking them helpful questions that challenged or at least explored their reasoning behind making their choices. The current study has shown the importance of an established relationship over an unfamiliar adult visiting the PRU, as the VCSW asked helpful questions and explored why they were interested in choosing specific options, and this was triangulated with their academic progress allowing for realistic and informed choices to be made that were more likely to result in successful transitions.

This also relates to Erikson's (1968) 'role confusion'; described by Stevens (1983) as an unwillingness to commit. Whilst some participants found it challenging at times to commit to a choice, it is fair to say that this is a natural part of the process considering the criticality of the decisions being made, however with the positive relationships, extended curriculum offered at JR-PRU and targeted support throughout Years 10 and 11, the young people were guided through their role confusion and were able to make what appeared to be appropriate and realistic decisions regarding their post-16 education and training.

Interestingly, Kidd and Wardman (1999) found that receiving one-to-one advice from a careers adviser had no effect on young people's self-assessed preparation or decision-making, which the current study would appear to support, despite the student participants not being asked this question explicitly. Dyke et al. (2008) found that the young people in their study were cynical regarding official sources of information, and preferred other sources including those with whom they had personal relationships.

The longitudinal design of the present study allowed for the vital finding to be captured that decision-making is a process, and decisions sometimes change over time; they do not always remain constant. This happens for various reasons, including young people lacking confidence in their own abilities, supporting Mainwaring and Hallam (2010). Findings showed that it is important that constant support is available, especially throughout Years

10 and 11, to enable young people to receive personalised guidance throughout their decision-making process, and to help raise their self-confidence. If young people do not receive this support when they need it, the end result is more likely to be a lack of care and/or becoming disengaged with the process. Furthermore, the importance of receiving appropriate and correct advice was clear in the current study, in order to avoid making decisions that are likely to lead to dropping out or a need to change courses, as described by Kidd and Wardman (1999), especially considering drop-outs are more likely for young people who received poor GCSE results (Audit Commission & Ofsted, 1993; Ofsted, 2013; Payne, 1995), and those attending PRUs are at risk of falling into this bracket (DfE, 2015c).

Interestingly, considering the criticality of the stage of education and the gravity of the decisions being made, research would suggest that the decision-making capacities of the present sample would likely have been impaired (Casey et al., 2008; Steinberg, 2007; van Duijvenvoorde et al., 2010; Von Der Embse et al., 2013). The current study did not measure participants' capacity to make decisions, however the findings suggest that the environment in JR-PRU supported the young people throughout Years 10 and 11 to help them to feel as calm as possible, supporting their capacity to make appropriate decisions and having the VCSW to further help the students to ensure that their decisions were realistic. These findings also support previous research that has asserted the importance of context (Foskett et al., 2008; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999), which will now be explored in more detail.

### 6.4 Research Question Two: What contextual factors support these young people to make decisions that are likely to be successful, allowing them to move forward?

Findings from the current research highlighted that it was important for participants to feel cared about, and the nurturing environment of JR-PRU appeared to provide them with a containing, safe space, allowing them to feel more relaxed in relation to making decisions about next steps, and spend more time focusing on their education.

Participants in the current study appeared to trust staff at the PRU, especially the VCSW, possibly providing them with an experience of feeling as though the risk of making a wrong decision was minimised as a result. Feeling cared about leads to young people trusting the adults who provide this containing experience. This supports Dyke et al. (2008), who showed that young people try to manage risks when making decisions by relying on trusted relationships such as those with family, friends and preferred teachers.

A personalised curriculum was vital in providing young people at JR-PRU with experiences of courses that they would otherwise not have had the opportunity for. It also allowed for a supportive and engaging curriculum whereby staff were able to target their lessons to students' interests. Positive impact of individualised curricula in which young people have a choice of what to study has been shown (Gracey & Kelly, 2010; Kendall et al., 2007; Wilkin et al., 2009), and was supported by the current findings.

This, along with other important structures, namely encouraging engagement with other provisions such as local colleges during key stage 4 education, and finding relevant, flexible work experience for the young people, appeared to help prepare the participants for their chosen paths. This is consistent with Dyke et al. (2008), who asserted that independent or mediated experience was favoured over secondary sources of information such as prospectuses and online research. Their research also yielded the finding that whilst many students acknowledged that schools try hard to provide relevant careers information, work experience was the most important structure organised by the school in helping students to make decisions related to post-16 options.

JR-PRU ensured that even when a student was disengaged with the idea of work experience they provided some mediated experience through a linked alternative provision, making it safe and manageable. This experience was described as being helpful for the young person, showing further support for Dyke et al. (2008), who found that 'experiential learning activities' like drama workshops, work experience and engagement with local colleges help young people to think about post-16 options.

The PRU provided other experiences to help young people with their decision-making processes. Students in Year 11 were provided with additional responsibilities, such as being allowed to leave the PRU site for lunch. This provided experience of practising skills needed when they leave

the nurturing setting of the PRU, such as effective time management. It also provided an opportunity for the PRU to show that they trusted and respected their students.

Participants in the current study consistently referred to family members, especially when thinking about who had been influential in their decision-making processes. Whilst not always, the majority of the time the family members that were most influential were parents/carers, supporting Tynkkynen et al. (2010), who asserted that parents are influential in young people's decision-making processes related to careers. Dyke et al. (2008) found that family are one of young people's trusted sources for information that they considered to be more influential than factors such as PSHE lessons. In addition, Mangan et al. (2001) explored sources of information used when making decisions, and found that 78% of young people in their study identified their parents.

As well as family, the participants in the current study identified friends as being influential in making decisions about where to go and what to do when leaving JR-PRU. This is consistent with Mangan et al. (2001), who showed that 44% of their sample used their friends' views as a source of information when making decisions, and is also consistent with other research (Dyke et al., 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999). For some participants, this resulted in making the same decision as a friend, such as deciding to go to college because their friends had made the decision to do this. This supports Hemsley-Brown (1999), who showed that young people who had friends at

school who were going to college were more likely to also go to college themselves. This may also be linked to another finding of the current study related to young people not wanting to be the only one in their friendship group not to go on to college, as this could be seen as 'failing'.

The importance of the young people feeling self-confident was reflected in the adult and student interviews. The head teacher and VCSW explained that they felt a key part of their role was supporting the young people at the PRU to feel more confident. The ways in which they attempted to do this was by building strong relationships with them in which they listened and showed an interest in them so that the young people were more likely to introject a sense of importance and thereby build on their confidence. When asked how likely participants felt it was that they would achieve the necessary GCSE grades to move on to their chosen path, on a scale of zero to 10, the modal score provided was 8, suggesting that they did feel confident. This is somewhat unusual in a PRU setting (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010), suggesting that JR-PRU's focus on building their students' confidence appears to be having a positive impact.

Mainwaring and Hallam (2010) found that there was a large difference in the number of positive possible selves generated between a mainstream and PRU setting; 100% of participants in a mainstream setting generated positive possible selves, compared with 69% of participants at a PRU. Whilst the sample of the current study was smaller than Mainwaring and Hallam's, the present study does not support this finding, further suggesting that the

current sample felt confident about reaching their future goals despite being in a PRU setting due to the support available and the focus of the staff regarding increasing the students' confidence in preparation for their future.

The importance of the VCSW helping students to prepare for their post-16 interviews was mentioned several times. The support clearly did not end at the point at which a student applied for a pathway, but instead the VCSW provided support with things that many young people may become anxious about, specifically how to prepare for, and how to behave in an interview. JR-PRU evidently provide a great deal of support to ensure as much as possible that their students all experience a successful transition to the institutions they had chosen to attend, which was valued by the student participants..

Participants felt less pressured at JR-PRU. One factor that helped to reduce their sense of pressure was the influence of having a positive, trusting rapport with staff. This is consistent with previous findings that the decision-making process is influenced by school staff, especially those who are favoured and trusted (Dyke et al., 2008; Foskett et al., 2008; Kidd & Wardman, 1999). Similarly, Hemsley-Brown (1999) acknowledges that the decision-making processes are interactive and influenced by friends, family and teachers.

Another factor that appeared to help reduce young people's sense of pressure was a lack of compulsory homework throughout their time at JR-

PRU. The head teacher explained that the reason for not setting compulsory homework was to provide further experiences that prepare the young people for moving on and for the world of work in the future by providing them with more responsibility over their own learning. More research is needed to explore the supportive nature of such strategies, although in the current study it appeared to be helpful in reducing a sense of pressure and encouraging the young people to take more responsibility for their learning.

A third factor that helped reduce young people's sense of pressure was the general ethos and environment of JR-PRU. Much of this related to the language used to describe JR-PRU, in that the head teacher was keen to ensure that staff and students referred to it as a 'school' rather than a PRU, to encourage high expectations of the students. Seemingly as a result of the significance placed on such language, the staff appeared to be more aware of the language they used on a day-to-day basis, which helped students to feel less pressured, such as phrasing potentially anxiety-provoking information in ways that did not add to the already-pressured time for the young people.

Foskett et al. (2008) found that four factors within schools had a clear influence on the decision-making of the young people in their study regarding post-16 options. One of these factors was 'the characteristics of school leadership, ethos and values', which the current study supports. Whilst Foskett et al. (2008) identified four different categories within school ethos, the current study appears to relate most to their 'student-centred orientation'

schools; however no PRUs or alternative provisions were used in their study and so a direct comparison is not possible. Staff in identified student-centred orientation schools believed that their pupils were more important than the desires and political and social pulls of the institution. The participants in the study who were based in a school with no sixth form also emphasised the necessity of ensuring as much information as possible was available to students. The current study supports these findings, however there was no comparison group in a school with a sixth form, as this was not necessary to explore the research questions posited.

### 6.5 Limitations of the current study

In designing the current research, informed decisions were made regarding various elements of the methodology (see Chapter 3) to ensure that the study met the aims posited and was valid and as robust as possible considering the sample and the setting of JR-PRU. The decisions made naturally resulted in some limitations to the current research, and these will now be focused on.

A longitudinal embedded case study with the use of semi-structured interviews was adopted with participants forming the multiple units of analysis. Other designs could have been used to enable more than one PRU and a larger sample to be focused on, such as with the use of questionnaires, although this would have resulted in participants' experiences being captured retrospectively. As previous literature indicated that decision-making is a process that happens over time (Foskett &

Hemsley-Brown, 2001), and highlighted the importance of context (Foskett et al., 2008; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999), the decision was made to focus on one PRU to enable a longitudinal design that captured a sense of participants' decision-making processes over time in one specific context. The implication is that the findings cannot be truly generalised beyond the context of JR-PRU, although as asserted by Yin (2012), analytic generalisations may be tentatively made in order to relate some findings to similar settings.

The research took place in a Greater London borough with a predominantly white middle class population, and so the white British sample is unsurprising, although impacts upon the transferability of the findings. Also, whilst the present study was longitudinal in nature and allowed for each student participant to be interviewed three times, a limitation was that the time constraints of the DEdPsy course did not allow for interviews to take place following the transition to post-16 education/training. This would have added a valuable element in that it would have allowed an idea of whether or not the participants experienced a successful transition. However, the aim of the present study was to understand how the young people made their decisions, and so this limitation does not negatively impact upon this aim.

It must be acknowledged that the reliant on my analysis techniques and skills during the data analysis process will have incurred limitations to the study, and whilst themes were identified using inductive thematic analysis, my theoretical, ontological and epistemological position will have been present in

the analysis. In an attempt to increase the reliability of the coding process, a modified version of inter-coder agreement (Guest et al., 2012) was used whereby a full transcript was coded with a second coder. This process enabled more than one interpretation of the views of the participant, deliberating on disagreed codes until new, modified versions were created collaboratively. Furthermore, the second coder was an educational psychologist who had previously had experience of using thematic analysis and so was aware of the process.

### 6.6 Future research

There is scope for further research into the area of decision-making processes with other vulnerable young people who attend PRUs and other forms of alternative provision. A strength of the current research was the longitudinal design, and so further research in the area should also adopt a longitudinal design to ensure that the decision-making process is captured rather than reflected on in retrospect to reflect changing decisions and factors that affect decision-making. Future research should also follow participants through their transition and, where possible, into the second term of the academic year, as this would likely capture those who drop out and/or become NEET during the first term, as referenced by the DfE (2014b; 2015a; 2016). Further research into how young people make decisions regarding post-16 options in other settings, including mainstream, is also necessary as this is still relatively lacking, again especially with a longitudinal design.

### 6.7 Implications for educational psychology practice

The organisation and forward thinking of JR-PRU related to supporting its students to make decisions regarding post-16 options was the result of previous engagement with an educational psychologist, reinforcing the fact that educational psychologists regularly work in and with PRUs (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Cullen & Raomoutar, 2003), and confirming an essential role for the profession that many educational psychologists and head teachers of PRUs and alternative provisions may not have considered; helping PRUs to support the decision-making process of their students regarding post-16 education and training.

It is important to share good practice, and educational psychologists are well placed to complete and use research such as this to do just that (Cullen & Monroe, 2010), and help other PRUs to set up initiatives that will help them to support young people effectively. Furthermore, educational psychologist training includes input from the domain of organisational psychology, enabling them to complete such work at the systems level of an organisation.

Considering that educational psychologists frequently work at the level of the individual, group and organisation, and draw upon a wide field of theoretical frameworks (Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Cullen & Raomoutar, 2003), it is imperative that educational psychologists work closely and collaboratively with the adults in PRUs. Adults who work in such close proximity with vulnerable young people, such as those at JR-PRU, may benefit from a regular reflective space, in order to think about the ways in which they are

supporting their students and how they might be able to provide the most effective and caring support possible. It will be helpful for educational psychologists to draw on a solution-focused approach when helping staff to do this, as asserted by various practitioners (e.g. Redpath & Harker, 1999; Wagner and Gillies, 2001). Additionally, ensuring that staff in PRUs feel competent in their role is also essential, and so it would also benefit these adults to seek advice from educational psychologists using a consultation framework to help build and nurture their confidence (Wagner & Gillies, 2001). The use of solution-focused thinking (de Shazer, et al., 1986) would again be appropriate to support this process in order to reassure them that they have the resources within themselves to promote positive change.

### 6.8 Implications for LAs and educational settings

The current research also implicates LAs. There is a clear governmental focus on supporting young people through the transition to post-16 education and training and beyond (DfEH, 2015), and the findings of the present study indicate that educational psychologists can and should be used more to support senior leadership teams to create structures and initiatives related to supporting young people to make appropriate and informed decisions regarding their post-16 options, not only in provisions such as PRUs.

The findings also emphasise the importance of having a familiar adult who is knowledgeable about the local context and the young people, to support their decision-making processes, ensuring that external careers advice, the ineffectiveness of which has been discussed in relation to previous research

and the findings of the current study (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2015b; Ofsted, 2013), is not solely relied upon. As asserted by Evans et al. (2010), CEIAG should be personalised for each young person, and this would then allow for that to be possible, and would enable key factors such as a knowledge of distances and travel times between students' homes and potential choices to be considered. The current study also reinforces the significance of having regular conversations with young people regarding their post-16 options in Years 10 and 11, to complement the decision-making process over time.

Implications for educational settings are also clear. Alternative provisions such as PRUs would benefit from sharing practice regarding structures and initiatives that work. All PRUs should consider appointing a member of staff with a role similar to the VCSW in JR-PRU to ensure that young people are making the most appropriate decisions for them that are likely to be successful, avoiding becoming NEET in the future. PRUs should provide as wide a curriculum as possible, drawing on the resources and expertise of local colleges and businesses, and as individualised a curriculum as possible to support the interests and goals of the young people. The necessity of a differentiated and personalised curriculum is highlighted by the SEND Code of Practice (DfEH, 2015).

The current study also highlights the positive impact made by adults vocalising their perceptions of students' strengths in relation to future possibilities, and so should make young people explicitly aware of what they are good at. It is also important for staff in PRUs and other alternative

provisions to understand the negative effects of pressure on young people's decision-making processes so as to not increase the chances of young people dropping out or swapping courses/institutions due to inappropriate placement (Kidd & Wardman, 1999; Martinez & Munday, 1998), which may be partly due to applied pressure. Finally, it is vital for young people in Years 10 and 11 who are in a PRU setting to experience a substantial proportion of time in other settings with the use of relevant and flexible independent or mediated work experience to help the young people prepare for adulthood.

### 6.9 Conclusion

This study has provided a unique contribution to the field of educational psychology and the literature on decision-making regarding post-16 training and education. The experiences of young people in a PRU setting regarding their decision-making at a critical time concerning post-16 preferences have delivered new insights into a vulnerable cohort of students.

The findings are in line with previous research carried out in different settings that promotes decision-making as a process that happens over time and is heavily influenced by context (Foskett et al., 2008; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 1999), and supports the necessity of a differentiated and individualised curriculum as reinforced by the DfEH (2015) and appropriate and personalised CEIAG as asserted by Evans et al. (2010).

The relevance of this research to educational psychology practice is clear, with an understanding of the systemic ways in which educational

psychologists can promote change at the level of the organisation. Recommendations for educational psychologists and LAs following the findings have been postulated.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1: Student interview schedule - Wave 1**

## Student Interview Schedule - Wave 1

The purpose of this interview schedule is to use as a prompt, if necessary, however the questions asked during the interview will be guided by the young person being interviewed.

Some of these questions are task-based (Q9, Q10), and so the young person will be given a choice of tasks that they can do throughout the interview.

1. **Warm-up activities**

2. How's it going?

3. What do you like doing? (and other 'getting to know you' questions)

4. How long have you been attending the PRU?

5. On a scale of 0-10, 0 meaning 'very much dislike' and 10 meaning 'really like/love', how do you feel about attending the PRU?

   0----------10

   a. Why?
   b. Why are you not a (x-1)?
   c. What might make you move up to a (x+1)?
   d. What do you like/dislike about being at the PRU?
      i. Why?

6. What is different between the PRU and your mainstream school?
   a. How/why?
   b. What else...?

7. Can you tell me about a typical day at the PRU?
   a. Timetable / lessons / break/lunch times / behaviour

8. How long do you expect to attend the PRU for?
   a. Why?

9. Laddering: (give participant the 6 squares of paper with role titles) On the other side of each square, write the initials of someone you know well who fits the description. In what important way are two of these people similar and thereby different from the third?
   a. Elicit constructs
   b. Pyramid

10. Once more constructs have been obtained, create a Self Image Profile and explore:
    a. ‘as I am’
    b. ‘as I was’
    c. ‘as I’d like to be’

11. Can you think of something that has happened between September and now that you are happy about/proud of yourself for?
    a. Tell me more.
    b. How did you...?
    c. What helped you to...?
    d. How did you feel when...?

12. Can you think of something that has happened between September and now that you are less happy about?
    a. Tell me more.
    b. What happened?
    c. How did you feel when...?

13. What do you want to do when you leave the PRU?

14. What do you want to do when you are older?
    a. Is that what you have always wanted to do?

15. How are you going to get there?

16. On a scale of 0-10, 0 meaning ‘nowhere near’ and 10 meaning ‘you’re a (answer to question 11)’, where are you now?

    0----------10

    a. Why?
    b. Why are you not a (x-1)?
    c. What would it look like if you were a (x+1)?
    d. What do you need to do get to a (x+1)?
    e. What is stopping you from getting to a (x+1)?

**Appendix 2: Student interview schedule - Wave 2**

## Student Interview Schedule - Wave 2

The purpose of this interview schedule is to use as a prompt, if necessary, however the questions asked during the interview will be guided by the young person being interviewed.

**Confidentiality, Anonymity and Permission to Record (script):**

'Before we start, I'm going to remind you of my research and check that you are happy to take part and for me to record our voices today.

I am completing some research as part of my studies to become an Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am interested in finding out about how the young people attending this provision in KS4 education, like you, make decisions about their next steps, and how they are supported in making these decisions. The questions I ask you today will be on this topic and I am expecting the interview to last between half an hour and 45 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you agree to take part, I would like to voice-record this interview, if that's okay with you. Any personally identifiable information collected during this interview will be kept strictly confidential and there will be nothing included in my write-up that could trace anything back to you.

Do you have any questions about my research?

Are you happy to take part in this research by being interviewed today?

Are you happy for me to voice-record this interview?'

1. Introductory questions (e.g. how have things been since July when I last saw you? What have you been up to? What did you do over the summer? Etc.)

2. So, this is your last year at [name of PRU]. How are you feeling about that?

3. What are your plans for when you leave? (When I saw you in July you said you were interested in ____)
    a. Why?

4. Can you tell me how you came to make / how you made decisions about where to go and what to do when you leave here?

a. What, in school, has helped/is helping you to make these decisions? (activities? Has anyone come in to help?)
    i. How / What is your experience of this?
b. What, out of school, has helped/is helping you to make these decisions?
    i. How / What is your experience of this?
c. Who has been influential when making these decisions?
    i. How?
d. How easy/difficult has it been to make these decisions?
    i. Why?
e. What support has been available to you to help you to make decisions about what to do after you leave [name of PRU]?

5. What have you done so far to help you to get to _____ when you leave here?
    a. How did you know what to do? (if appropriate - i.e. did someone help you? How?)
    b. What else do you need to do?
    c. How will you do this?

6. How do you think ____ will be different to school?
    a. What are you looking forward to about _____?
    b. What are you not looking forward to as much?

7. Is there anything you're worried/nervous/concerned about?
    a. What?
    b. Why?
    c. How have/could you get help/advice with this?

8. If all goes well, where do you think you'll be in five years time? What will you be doing?

9. What if it doesn't go so well?

10. Last time we met, I asked you where, on a scale of 0-10, you felt that you were in terms of knowing what you want to do in the future and how to get there. You said that you were a ___. Where do you feel that you are now on this same scale?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

    a. (if there has been a change) What has helped you to move up to a __? / What has caused you to move down to a __?
    b. How has this change happened?

11. Where do you hope to be this time next year?

a. What do you hope to be doing?
b. How have you made this decision?

12. How likely do you feel it is that you will reach this?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

a. Why are you not a (x-1)?
b. What might get you to a (x+1)?
c. What steps have you taken so far to get there and how have you done this? (relate to decision making process)

13. How likely do you think it is that you will go into (career field) in the future?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

a. Why are you not a (x-1)?
b. What might get you to a (x+1)?

14. What do you have to do before the end of Year 11 to ensure that you go where you want after leaving [name of PRU]?

15. How and when might you do these things?
    a. Who will help you?
    b. Deadline for college applications/apprenticeships, etc.?

16. How supported do you feel in making decisions about what to do/where to go after [name of PRU]?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

a. Why are you not a (x-1)? i.e. What is helpful about the support you have available to you / what has helped you to feel supported / what makes you feel supported?
b. What might get you a (x+1)? i.e. What might be more helpful going forward? What might this support look like? Who would be providing this support?

**Appendix 3: Student interview schedule - Wave 3**

# Student Interview Schedule - Wave 3

The purpose of this interview schedule is to use as a prompt, if necessary, however the questions asked during the interview will be guided by the young person being interviewed.

**Confidentiality, Anonymity and Permission to Record (script):**

'Before we start, I'm going to remind you of my research and check that you are happy to take part and for me to record our voices today.

I am completing some research as part of my studies to become an Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am interested in finding out about how the young people attending this provision in KS4 education, like you, make decisions about their next steps, and how they are supported in making these decisions. The questions I ask you today will be on this topic and I am expecting the interview to last between fifteen and twenty minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you agree to take part, I would like to voice-record this interview, if that's okay with you. Any personally identifiable information collected during this interview will be kept strictly confidential and there will be nothing included in my write-up that could trace anything back to you.

Do you have any questions about my research?

Are you happy to take part in this research by being interviewed today?

Are you happy for me to voice-record this interview?'

1. How have things been since December when I last saw you?
    a. How were your mock exams?
        i. Did you get the results you were expecting? / Hoping for?

2. You'll soon be leaving [name of PRU] now. When we last spoke you said that (individualise). What has happened since then?
    a. What are you doing at the moment / What have you been doing?
    b. Are you still intending to...?
    c. How was the interview? (if appropriate)
    d. Based on your results for your mock exams is there anything you feel that you need to do to ensure you get the grades you need?

e. What are you doing at the moment to help you get to where you need to be?

3. Have you made a final decision on what you're going to do when you leave here? (if appropriate)
    a. How have you achieved this? (How did you make that decision?)
    b. What has helped you? (In/out of school)
        i. How has this helped you?
    c. Who has helped you? (In/out of school)
        i. Who has been influential in helping you to make this decision?
        ii. How have they helped you?
        iii. Who has been the most helpful in supporting you to make this decision?
        iv. Have you had an experience of a careers adviser who has come in from outside the school? Have you been offered this?
        v. Have you spent time over the last two years talking about careers in any lessons?

4. How easy/difficult has it been to make/stick to your decision?

5. How are you feeling about your decision now?

6. What are you looking forward to about next year?

7. Say you turn up at _____ tomorrow, what do you think it will be like?
    a. What do you think you will notice?
    b. What will be different to the PRU?
    c. What will you see?
    d. How will you feel?

8. Is there anything about next year that you are worried/nervous about?
    a. How do you think the transition will go?
    b. How will you manage the change from this setting to _____? (going from a small place to a larger one, etc.)

9. You've said that you've decided to _____. What grades do you need to get to do this?
    a. On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely do you feel it is that you will achieve these grades?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

        i. Why are you not a (x-1)?
        ii. What would make you a (x+1)?

10. If all goes well, where do you see yourself in five years time? What will you be doing? How likely do you think it is that you will get there?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. How supported have you felt in making decisions about where to go/what to do when you leave [name of PRU]?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

    a. Why are you not a (x-1)? i.e. What has been helpful about the support you have available to you / what has helped you to feel supported / what makes you feel supported?
    b. What might get you to a (x+1)? i.e. What would have made the support better? Are there other things you think you might have found helpful in supporting you to make decisions about moving on? What might this support look like? Who would be providing this support?

**Appendix 4: Head Teacher interview schedule**

## Interview Schedule - Head Teacher

The purpose of this interview schedule is to use as a prompt, if necessary, however the questions asked during the interview will be guided by the person being interviewed.

**Confidentiality, Anonymity and Permission to Record (script):**

'Before we start, I'm going to remind you of my research and check that you are happy to take part and for me to record our voices today.

I am completing some research as part of my studies to become an Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am interested in finding out about how the young people attending this provision in KS4 education make decisions about their next steps, and how they are supported in making these decisions. The questions I ask you today will be on this topic and I am expecting the interview to last between half an hour and 45 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you agree to take part, I would like to voice-record this interview, if that's okay with you. Any personally identifiable information collected during this interview will be kept strictly confidential and there will be nothing included in my write-up that could trace anything back to you.

Do you have any questions about my research?

Are you happy to take part in this research by being interviewed today?

Are you happy for me to voice-record this interview?'

*Background*

How many students are usually on role at [name of PRU]?

1. What are the reasons young people normally attend this provision?

2. In the past, where have young people progressed to after KS4 education here? And how has the school supported their progression?
    a. What help have the students received with their transition after GCSEs?
    b. What are the reasons for moving on to these particular places? (i.e. educational possibilities)

*Decision making*

3. Thinking about where young people have progressed to after KS4 education at [name of PRU], how have the young people made their decisions about where to go and what to do?

a. What is the process?
b. What do you think influences their decisions?
c. How do you think they have felt when making these decisions?

*The role of the school*

4. How does the school support students to make decisions related to moving on after finishing at [name of PRU] at the end of Year 11?
    a. What is built into the curriculum to support the young people with this (e.g. types of activities, time in timetable, etc.)?
    b. Are there any services you involve in supporting the students in making the decisions?
        i. External Careers Advisors?
        ii. Other programmes (e.g. the Young Apprenticeship Programme, etc.)

5. How well do you feel [name of PRU] support students in making decisions about where they will go when they leave at the end of Year 11?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

    a. Why is it not a (x-1)? i.e. what does the school do well?
    b. Why is it not a (x+1)? i.e. how might this improve?

*Strengths and challenges*

6. In your experience, what does this school do that works well in supporting the young people to make decisions about moving on after leaving [name of PRU]?
    a. What, in your experience, has the school done in the past that has worked well in supporting young people to get to where they have decided they want to be?
        i. Why do you think this has worked well (what is it about the approach that works well?)?

7. What do you, as a school, find challenging about supporting the young people to make decisions about what to do when they leave here?
    a. How do you/the school overcome these?
    b. How does this impact on the young people?

*Support provided to the school*

8. What support do you receive in order to help the young people make these important decisions, and what does this support look like?
    a. From the government/legislation?
    b. From the Local Authority?
    c. Do you get support from other professionals? If so, who? And how do they support you?
    d. Are the young people recruited by external programmes?

9. What is helpful about this support?

10. What would make this support better?
11. How did the role of Vocational Curriculum Support Worker come about?
    a. What is the difference between this role and that of a Careers Guidance Officer?
    b. How does this role have an impact on the young people?

12. How do you think an Educational Psychologist could help you to support vulnerable students to make decisions related to moving on after leaving a PRU at the end of KS4 education?

*Transition to next steps*

13. Once the young people have finished their KS4 education here, how is their transition from [name of PRU] managed and supported? (e.g. transition workers? Liaison?)

14. Is there any support from [name of PRU] available to the young people following their transition?
    a. Who provides this?
    b. How? What does this support look like?
    c. What is the purpose of this support? (i.e. to prevent the young people from becoming disengaged with the programme?)

15. Is there anything else I haven't asked you and you would like to add?

**Appendix 5: VCSW interview schedule**

## Interview Schedule - Vocational Curriculum Support Worker

The purpose of this interview schedule is to use as a prompt, if necessary, however the questions asked during the interview will be guided by the person being interviewed.

**Confidentiality, Anonymity and Permission to Record (script):**

'Before we start, I'm going to remind you of my research and check that you are happy to take part and for me to record our voices today.

I am completing some research as part of my studies to become an Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education. I am interested in finding out about how the young people attending this provision in KS4 education make decisions about their next steps, and how they are supported in making these decisions. The questions I ask you today will be on this topic and I am expecting the interview to last between half an hour and 45 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you agree to take part, I would like to voice-record this interview, if that's okay with you. Any personally identifiable information collected during this interview will be kept strictly confidential and there will be nothing included in my write-up that could trace anything back to you.

Do you have any questions about my research?

Are you happy to take part in this research by being interviewed today?

Are you happy for me to voice-record this interview?'

*Your role and context*

1. Can you describe your role within [name of PRU]?
    a. How long have you been a VCSW?
    b. What does the job involve?
    c. What do you see as being different about your role from that of a Careers Guidance Officer?
    d. How do you support students to make decisions related to moving on after KS4 education?
        i. When does this support begin?
        ii. What steps are needed?

2. What do you enjoy about your role?

3. What is challenging about your role?

a. What are the challenges in preparing the young people to move on to the next phase of their education/career (if this is different)?
    iii. How do you manage/overcome these?

4. In the past, where have young people progressed to after KS4 education here? And how has the school supported their progression?
    a. What help have the students received with their transition after GCSEs?
    b. What are the reasons for moving on to these particular places? (i.e. educational possibilities)

5. Thinking about where young people have progressed to after KS4 education at [name of PRU], how have the young people made their decisions about where to go and what to do?
    a. What is the process?
    b. What do you think influences their decisions?
    c. How do you think they have felt when making these decisions?

6. What has worked well in the past for supporting young people at this school to make decisions about next steps after leaving here?

Present cohort of YP

7. Every cohort must be quite different at this school, just as it is in other schools. What have been the challenges in preparing this cohort of young people to move onto the next phase of their career?
    a. How have you been supporting them so far to make decisions about where to go next?
    b. What is the next step with supporting them?
        iv. i.e. deadlines for college applications/apprenticeships, etc.?

8. What do you feel is working well at the moment in preparing this cohort of young people to move onto the next phase of their career?
    a. Why? Can you tell me more about that?

9. In your opinion, is there any other support that might help these young people, that they are not currently receiving?
    a. If so, what?
    b. How would this help?
    c. How could they receive this support in the future?

10. How do you support a young person who doesn't know what direction they want to go in after leaving school? How do you cater for these young people?

11. Many young people here have needs that are more related to their mental health, such as anxiety around being in large groups and/or

low mood. What are the implications of your role when it comes to thinking about preparing them to move on from this school?

a. How is your support different to when you are helping those whose difficulty is more behavioural?

12. How well do you feel [name of PRU] support students in making decisions about where they will go when they leave at the end of Year 11?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

a. Why is it not a (x-1)?
b. Why is it not a (x+1)?

*Transition support*

13. How is the transition from here to FE colleges/ apprenticeships/ etc. supported after the young people have completed their GCSEs?

14. Is there any support from [name of PRU] available to the young people following their transition?
    a. Who provides this?
    b. How? What does this support look like?
    c. What is the purpose of this support? (i.e. to prevent the young people from becoming disengaged with the programme?)

*Role of the EP*

15. How do you think an Educational Psychologist could help you to support vulnerable students to make decisions related to moving on after leaving a PRU at the end of KS4 education?

16. Is there anything else I haven't asked you and you would like to add?

**Appendix 6: Parent letter and consent form**

Leading education and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

Dear Parent/Carer,

**RE: Pupil Referral Unit Research**

My name is Adam and I am currently training to be an Educational Psychologist with XX Educational Psychology Service and the Institute of Education, University of London.

The reason I am writing to you is to let you know that I will be carrying out a piece of research at [name of PRU] over the next eight months that aims to capture the decision-making processes of students who are attending regarding post-16 education and training.

I intend to speak to a number of Year 10 students about how they make decisions about next steps and how they are supported to do so. As your child is currently attending [name of PRU] and is in Year 10, I would very much value the opportunity to speak to them about their experiences.

As an Educational Psychologist in Training, I regularly work within schools in the XX Local Authority, and so I have been checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS, formerly the Criminal Records Bureau) and am eligible to do so.

Information about the interviews:

- Three interviews will be arranged over the course of the year and will take no longer than 30 minutes each.
- Interviews will take place at [name of PRU], during school hours.
- Your son/daughter will be asked questions about their decision-making processes related to post-16 education/training.
- All of your son/daughter's interview responses will be confidential and the name of your son/daughter and the name of the school will not be identified in the research. The name of your son/daughter will only be known to myself as the researcher.
- The interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder. This is so that I can remember what your son/daughter has said during the interviews.
- You can withdraw your son/daughter from the research process at any time, and you do not have to provide a reason for this.
- Upon my completion of the research, a summary report will be sent to the school for you to access.

If you are agreeable to this process, please kindly sign and return the consent form on the next page.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me using the details provided below.

I am very grateful for your support.

Yours Faithfully,

Adam Rossello
Trainee Educational Psychologist
arossello@ioe.ac.uk

**RE: Pupil Referral Unit Research**

I give permission for my son/daughter to take part in the interviews regarding their decision-making processes at [name of PRU].

**Please tick as relevant:**
□ I understand that my son/daughter's participation is voluntary and they are able to withdraw at any stage of the research process.
□ I understand that the data will be anonymised and be kept confidential so will not be identifiable to the general population.
□ I understand that the interviews will be voice-recorded but the data will not use my son/daughter's name.

Signed: _____

Name: _____ Son/daughter's name: _____

Date: ___/___/___

**Appendix 7: Student information sheet and consent form**

Leading education and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

**Understanding the decision-making processes of young people in a pupil referral unit regarding post-16 education and training**

Hi there!

I'm Adam, and I'm training to be an Educational Psychologist, which means that I'm interested in schools and pupil referral units. I'm also Ms X's friend, and am interested in finding out about how you are making decisions about what to do when you leave here.

**I'd really like to talk to you...**
About how you are making decisions about what you are going to do when you leave [name of PRU], and how the school has helped you with this.

**Would you like to talk to me?**
If so, I'll meet with you 3 times over the next year, in the PRU, during lesson time. When we meet, we'll talk about what you've been up to at the PRU, and we can hang out for a while and chat about whatever comes up. Each time we meet will last about half an hour.

If it's okay with you, I'll use a digital voice recorder during our meetings. This is so that I can remember what you have said without writing it all down. Everything you say to me will be private and confidential, and I promise that I will be the only person who listens to these recordings.

**What will happen next?**
If you're happy to chat to me, that's great! If, after we've spoken, you decide that you don't want to see me again, that's also fine - you can stop at any time without saying why.

**Confidentiality**
Everything we talk about will be confidential, so I will not tell anyone at the PRU what you say to me. The only time I may have to tell someone, is if you tell me something that causes me to worry that you, or anyone else, is in danger. If this happens, I will talk to you about what information I need to pass on. When I write a summary of what you said, I will not use your name, so no one would know that this came from you.

**Further information**
I will be happy to answer your questions about this project at any time. You can contact me by email: arossello@ioe.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in taking part in my project.
Adam Rossello
Trainee Educational Psychologist

I would like to take part in the project about how I make decisions about when I leave [name of PRU].

**Please tick as relevant:**

□ I understand that my participation is voluntary.
□ I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time.
□ I understand that the meetings will be voice-recorded and will be kept confidential.
□ I understand that my name will not appear anywhere in the report.
□ I understand that I can ask Adam any questions I have about the research.

Signed: _____

Name: _____ School year: _____

Date: _____

**Appendix 8: Staff information sheet and consent form**

Leading education and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

**Understanding the decision-making processes of young people in a pupil referral unit regarding post-16 education and training**

Dear _____

My name is Adam Rossello and I am currently training to be an Educational Psychologist with XX Educational Psychology Service and the UCL Institute of Education, University of London. Part of the training involves carrying out some research, and I'm going to be carrying this out at [name of PRU] over the next eight months.

The research aims to explore how young people at a PRU make decisions, and are supported to make decisions related to moving on after they finish Key Stage 4 education. I intend to speak to a number of Year 10/11 students about this, and would also like to invite you to take part in the research and speak to you about the support that is provided by the PRU to help the young people make decisions.

**What will you have to do if you take part?**
Please complete the attached consent form and return this to me in the envelope provided so that I know you are interested.

1. We will arrange to meet in the PRU at a time which is convenient for you.
2. There will be an interview with myself during which I will ask you a number of questions. The interview is expected to last between 30-45 minutes, and if you do not object I would like to voice-record the interview.

**How much of your time will participation involve?**
One interview lasting no more than 45 minutes.

**Will your participation remain confidential?**
Yes. If you agree to take part, everything we talk about will be private and confidential, and no one else will listen to the recording. The information you provide will be used for the purpose of this research only.

When I write up the research, your name will not appear anywhere, and neither will any identifiable information regarding the PRU or anyone that you talk about during the interview.

**Do you have to take part?**
No, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you do not have to give a reason and you will not be asked again. Similarly, if you do agree to participate you are free to withdraw at any time during the project if you change your mind.

**What happens now?**
If you are interested in taking part in the research please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided. Alternatively you can hand this to me. Once I have received the slip I will contact you so we can arrange to meet at a time that is convenient for you. I will then visit and hold the interview.

**Further information**
I will be happy to answer your questions about this research at any time. You can contact me by email: arossello@ioe.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in taking part in my research.

Adam Rossello
Trainee Educational Psychologist

I would like to take part in the research.

**Please tick as relevant:**

□ I understand that my participation is voluntary.
□ I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time.
□ I understand that the meetings will be voice-recorded and will be kept confidential.
□ I understand that my name will not appear anywhere in the report.
□ I understand that I can ask Adam any questions I have about the research.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

## Appendix 9: Fully coded transcript

04.12.2015

[redacted] (Time 2)

Researcher: So, last time I saw you was July.

[redacted]: Yeah.

R: How have things been since then?

Belonging

J: Good. Things are good. Like, doing work, like kind of found my place in the school.

R: Okay, what do you mean by that?

Belonging/ settled

J: Kind of settled in with the people here and stuff like that.

R: Got your hair cut...

J: (laughs) Yeah.

R: Okay, so would you say that you're happy here?

Pref. for PRU environt

J: Yeah. And I would not go back to [redacted]. I would not go back to mainstream at all. I just prefer it here, the environment's much nicer.

R: And is that for the same kind of reasons that you said last time, which was about being smaller, less people?

Flexible environment

J: Yeah, it's more flexible and stuff.

R: Okay. Did you do anything nice over the summer?

J: Not really, just hung out with friends.

R: Okay. So, this is your last year at [redacted]. How are you feeling about that?

PRU diff. to school

Reduced sense of preme

J: It's kind of strange because I haven't even been here for a year and I'm already nearly ready to leave. So it feels a lot different than it would feel if I had stayed in [redacted]. At [redacted] it would probably feel a lot more different, but here the pressure doesn't seem as much. I was really worried about GCSEs in Year 10, but I feel at the moment I've now found out what GCSEs are like, they're basically just exams, so that's a big pressure because I've got over the worriedness of 'I'm going to fail this'.

R: And how do you think you've done that?

Supportive teachers reduces preme.

J: I think it's just confidence, and also support from teachers. Whereas in mainstream they'd say 'It's going to be really hard in exams', here it's a lot more... they don't directly put pressure on you. They do it through other

supporting teachers encourage

means, like by encouraging you instead of saying 'Come on, you've got to do this otherwise you're going to fail', they more encourage you.

R: So you're feeling less stressed about GCSEs than you feel you would be if you were still in your mainstream school?

less stressed

J: Yeah, definitely.

R: Okay, and how are you feeling, then, about... because like you say, you haven't been here for that long and you're already having to think about leaving. How are you feeling about all of that?

Sad about leaving formed Plans for leaving

J: Of course, I'd want to stay if I could. I could've gone on to the Sixth Form, but I don't really feel like that's what I want to do. It's sad that I'm getting ready to leave already, but I've already got planned what I want to do once I've left here.

R: Tell me about them - what are your plans?

J: Well, I never really knew what I wanted to do.

R: Yeah, last time we spoke you said you weren't sure what you wanted to do. You said you liked Drama, and you were also thinking about starting a business by buying stuff in bulk and then selling it on. So you weren't really sure, so yeah, give me an update.

Work experience to get information about jobs role / jobs

J: I've gone with the more accountancy side. So, I applied for an accountancy apprenticeship at [redacted] and I also got a work experience placement at [redacted], in [redacted], just to get an idea of how it works and how they manage accounts, and stuff, because obviously if I want to do accounting I need to start thinking about the environment, etcetera etcetera.

R: So are you getting that experience now at [redacted] or?

W/E to get info about role

Excited by idea of future job

J: I had my interview this Tuesday and I start on 7th January and I'll go one day a week for five, six weeks. It's 10 til' 3. I had the option when the woman came in, because it was kind of out of the blue, because the person who was meant to do it wasn't here so they asked me if I wanted to see about work experience, so they were asking me what I was enjoying and I said that I'd quite like to go into accounting, and stuff like that, and it was between the option of the [redacted] Bank, [redacted], or do some work in an accountancy office, and I didn't really want to work in an accountancy office because I know I'd get bored, but with this bank thing, a lot of the things I'll have to do they sound quite fun and exciting. I have to be like a secret agent for them.

R: A secret agent? How's that?

excited by idea of work experience

J: Basically, they're going to give me this pack and I'll work through it. One of the things I have to do is go into other banks, so I'll have to go into the [redacted] Bank, I'll have to go into [redacted] [redacted] whatever, and I have to assess how

they treat me and assess their customer service and then I report back to see if they can change anything.

Building on personal motivations

R: Okay, that does sound fun! So it's a bit like a 'mystery shopper' type thing?

J: Yeah. When she said it my face lit up because I love doing that kind of stuff.

R: I bet! So it sounds like you've made some big decisions about what you want to do when you leave here.

J: Yeah.

R: So, I'm quite interested to find out how you came to make those decisions.

Relative subject strength

Offices seen as boring

Adults prompting career thinking

avoidant of studying just subjects

Get to try it out first / see what its like

doing something that equals qualification

demotivated by A-levels & uni debt

Positives of apprenticeships (means, learning, happiness)

J: Well, whether I've liked Maths or not, that was always one of my strongest subjects. It was always the subject that I could not work my best in and still get a good grade, because I was just naturally talented in it. And I never thought I would go into something like that, because my mum works in accounts, so I never really thought I'd go into something like that because I though 'Oh, working in an office, boring', but when it came to [redacted] asking me about what I wanted to do for college, it got me thinking, and I was talking to my mum and I was going through [redacted] college, the colleges in [redacted], and all them colleges, and I couldn't really find anything that I want to do, and I thought... I didn't particularly want to go on to study any particular subjects. I had an idea, like I was going to do Maths, Physics and Business as my three if I did go on to do A-Levels, but then when I looked on the [redacted] thing I found that they did an accountancy apprenticeship, and I was thinking it gives me a chance to see what it's actually like, and you know, if I don't like it, or if I do need the qualifications to go on further I can always go back to college and get them, or whatever. With this thing I get a certificate, because it's AAT, which is like the accountancy traineeship thing, and I'll get a certificate, which means at the end of the 12 months I'd get something that's equivalent to three A-Levels, and stuff like that, and then that certificate would get me into the more advanced apprenticeship and then after that when I'm fully qualified, I'd go on to find an actual job. Because I always thought 'Oh, I'm going to go to college, I'm going to study this, do A-Levels, blah blah blah', but then I was just thinking, eventually, if I went down that road I'd probably end up going to uni, and uni fees are just dreadful, and I wouldn't want to have that debt on me at such a young age. So, because you get paid in apprenticeships, if I start getting work and I'm learning and I'm earning money, one, I'll probably be happy because the money I'm getting I actually earned, and I'll have money and I can spend it so there's a sense of satisfaction. It's something I'm just interested in.

Building on personal motivations

R: Yeah, okay, so when you were looking at colleges and deciding what you wanted to do, was someone helping you?

J: Yeah, the first time I really started thinking about it was when I got called in for the work experience.

Work exp. int. prompted thinking.

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R: When was that? Was that at the beginning of this academic year?

J: Yeah. I was talking to [redacted] and she was asking me about what I want to do, and I came to realise, 'I'm in Year 11, I need to start thinking about what I want to do', because when you're in Year 10 you don't really care, and as soon as you hit Year 11 you're like, 'I have to actually make life choices right now'. It was very hard but I did a lot of research at home on it because the stuff we did here, yeah it helped, but the more stuff you read into, the more likely you're going to find something that suited you. I came across [redacted] and I was like 'Oh, I may as well look at the apprenticeships', and I saw it and I took it into school and we sent off a letter to them.

R: Who's 'we'?

J: Me and [redacted]. She sat with me, we filled it in...

R: So it sounds like you got a bit of support here in terms of making you think about what you're going to next year, and then you went home and did a lot of research on your own, found what you wanted to do and then came here.

J: Yeah. And [redacted] said that she can work more with me when I didn't know, but the best thing she said was to do it in your own time because at the end of the day it's your choice, so it's easy for you to be persuaded just because someone else is giving you an answer, so she said try and figure out what you want to do, and I was looking through and I had written a list of... I had [redacted] College and [redacted], and on the [redacted] side I had the accountancy apprenticeship, and on the [redacted] College side I had A-Levels - so I would do the three A-Levels I said before. I just went to [redacted] and said that I didn't know what to do and she said 'Why don't you just do the apprenticeship because one, you're earning, you're learning, and there's always a possibility to go back after that 12 month period and get A-Levels, and at least then, if I get the A-Levels, work in accounts and realise I don't like it, then I've just wasted a year, so I want to get a feel for what it's like before I actually...

R: So it sounds like [redacted] helped you to think about weighing up between the two options.

J: Yeah, but what was all me was about the university because I was just thinking that the worst thing that could happen is to have a job that pays next to nothing and have 27 grand debt, and then you've got to think about renting some place and how expensive houses are. You've got to think, could you weigh up the two? Because, for me, I don't really want to live with my parents when I'm in my twenties. I kind of want to get somewhere where I'm more independent because I think then when I get there I can really find what I want to do, almost.

R: So it sounds like part of your decision, then, was led by not wanting to go to uni, so you were looking at options where you wouldn't have to go to uni because you didn't want to have to spend that money and be in debt.

finding options that avoid debt.

J: Yeah.

R: When you first met with [redacted], how did that meeting come about?

Adult prompting career agenda

Student having option to talk informally

J: She took me for Drama Studies, and in this particular lesson I had finished what I had to do so I didn't really have any work, so I was given the choice to talk to [redacted] about options after school or just read a book. So I was talking to [redacted], and we talked for a while and we looked, she had the brochures, or whatever, and we looked at them and I picked out a couple of things that maybe I'd like, and it was then that I really realised, because I always thought I wanted to do something with drama, but then I was thinking if I did pursue drama there's a big chance that nothing would come out of it, so instead I thought more about what would suit me best and what would get me a stable life, almost. So I was like, 'I like numbers, I'm pretty good at Maths, and my mum's an accountant, so she obviously knows this, so if I wanted to ask her anything she'd be able to answer me', so I was like 'I may actually give this a try', and as I was reading into it more it was like 'This is something I could see myself doing'.

weighing up pros & cons

imagining self in options

R: Okay. And that's when you were looking into it in your own time?

career decisions are hard and scary

uncertainty about what to do

J: Yeah, because I didn't realise how hard the decisions are until you're actually confronted with them, because you're asked all through your school life, 'What do you want to do when you're older?', even in Year 10, and even in Year 11 I was like 'I don't know. I don't know what I want to do', and I started getting scared, like 'What am I going to do? ' And also because colleges, at this time of year, or a bit later, start to fill up.

R: So there was a bit of pressure then.

Adult prompting career decision time

J: Yeah, so I think it was a huge wake-up call, talking to [redacted]

R: Okay. Something you said there interested me quite a bit, around how difficult you realised it was to make these kind of decisions. What makes it so difficult, do you think?

"in vivo" life-changing decisions

J: At our age, other than the decision about what we're going to do after Year 11, we haven't really made any life changing decisions. Like secondary school, that was a lot of input from parents, and your parents probably decided what was the best for you, etcetera, but at this stage you've got responsibility. You're in charge of what you want to do afterwards and you've got to also think, in 20 years or so, jobs are going to be taken over by computers, and I was just thinking and if I want to get somewhere in life, before I do anything or strive to save up for anything I need to get a job that pays me to live. So I was thinking so far into the future about how when I have kids I want to be able to buy them stuff and I don't always want to be like

Focus on own responsibility for decision

'job = money'

making a stepped plan

04.12.2015

'Oh no, you can't have that because we don't have the money', you know, I kind of want to have enough money to be able to live comfortably. So I want to get my feet in place before I start doing anything else.

Specific school based adult

R: So, you've already come on to this a little bit, but what, in school, as helped you to make these decisions, or what is still helping you, maybe, to make these decisions?

school/student collaboration

J: [redacted], definitely. When I got an email back from [redacted] because I got an email saying they had created my account, and I'm awaiting an interview. I don't know when it is, they have to arrange one, but it's really good, she took me to my work experience interview, and she's like 'Oh, how's the thing at [redacted], any word?' and I was like 'No', or I'll say 'Yeah, they emailed me', blah blah blah blah. So she kind of keeps touching in, so it's a lot more pressure because it's kind of like you're speaking to someone about it. And also one of the main things was probably my parents, but that's just me personally, because my parents have always been quite supportive, especially my mum.

Informality of support

frequent check in by adult: seen as positive

supportive parents.

R: Okay, how have your parents helped you to make these kind of decisions?

Building on strengths

J: Just by using what they know I'm good at, like my mum always said that she had an idea that I would do something in maths because I was always someone who would look at a problem and I'd find a way to solve it, or I'd be determined to solve it. If someone gives me a problem I will try my best to solve it, because it annoys me when I can't. And just my parents being really supportive of what I do, because when I was figuring out whether I wanted to do A-Levels or apprenticeships, I was saying it to my mum and she was saying, because the A-Levels I picked were, of course, Maths, Physics and Business, and my mum was saying about how they are going to be really hard, especially Maths and Physics, they require a lot of hard work and she tries not to sugarcoat it as much, because obviously I'm at this age where I can't have my mum making decisions for me, so it's kind of like she tries to tell me straight about what things are going to be like, so she said 'Do you really want to go and take a huge student loan out and have to pay that back for the rest of your life? Or do you want to pursue something that may not get you a job like Drama?' She's quite straightforward.

supportive parents

realistic parents & straightforward parents

R: It sounds like she was trying to be quite realistic.

J: Yeah. My mum's always kind of been realistic of expectations because she knows that I'm someone who if I get my hopes up and then it doesn't come to anything I feel really down. So I'd prefer someone to just tell me straight if it's not working.

R: So it sounds like, in terms of your parents, especially your mum, it's something about being really supportive, using what they know about you...

Building on strengths

J: Yeah, the things I'm good at, or the way I work. My mum knows that I get really fidgety if I'm sat down studying for too long, so when I study for things I

self-awareness

normally do it in sessions of 10 or 15 minutes and then five minutes break. 20 minutes, 10 minutes break. Because I find it really hard to do something for a long time unless I've got my mind set to do it.

R: Okay, so yeah there's also something around your mum having quite realistic expectations, and then just giving you the space to talk it through with her, which seems to be helping.

space to talk it through

J: Yeah.

R: So, at school then, you said about [redacted], and you said she took you to your work experience interview, and you said that she touches base with you quite often and checks how you're getting on and how things are going in terms of thinking about next steps.

J: Yeah.

R: Anything else? Either inside or outside of school.

Reduced sense of pressure

J: I think it's just the environment here. Because although everyone needs to think of what they want to do, the teachers don't put too much pressure on you. I remember when I was in [redacted] if something was late, I remember when I was going through a bad time and I kept getting kids coming up to me or my teacher saying 'Look, [redacted] we need your essay in right now. You have no more time'. Here, they take a more friendly approach, so they won't go 'Oh you've got to do this', they'll go 'Have you thought about what you want to do after you leave here?'

staff are less understanding in mainstream

friendly approach with deadlines

R: So it sounds like less pressure has been put on you?

Reduced sense of pressure

J: Yeah. It's almost like reverse psychology, in a way, like they get you to talk about it without you realising that you're actually kind of making a decision in your head. It's really weird, but it does help.

R: Okay, that's interesting. So it's maybe talking about it with you, and having conversations rather than just saying 'You need to make a decision about what you want to do'.

Friendly approach with decision-making. Reduced sense of pressure

J: Yeah. It's a lot more friendly. I think everything about the PRU is more friendly, like you get to get to call people by their first names, there's a lot more freedom. There are negative sides to that, but also there are more positives than negatives, like it helps a lot of people, like going out at break, and stuff.

PRU a friendly place.

R: Talk more about that - going out at break, how do you think that helps?

J: Well, I don't go out at break, but some people sneak into the garden and its just because.. I would like to because I get really stuffy and stressed out and the only way to clear my mind is to get fresh air. Things go in my mind and they don't come out, they just stay there and they're all jumbling around, so I

Need to leave site / get fresh air to relieve stress

would like if they let us out at break into the gardens but of course that's the teachers decision, and I already think that them letting us out at lunch is quite a big privilege.

R: So you do go out at lunch breaks?

Privilege to leave site for lunch.

J: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Year 11s are allowed out at lunch. It's quite a big privilege because if you don't come back by this time, you can't come back into school. It's your choice - they give you more responsibility.

More responsibility given at PRU (Trusted?)

R: Which is quite important thinking about moving onto the next step, because when you're at college I suppose no one will be saying 'This is what time you need to be back'.

Responsibility prepares YP for world of work

J: Yeah, and also it gets you ready for work, so we'll be up the shops and it'll be five-to and we'll be like 'alright, come on, we need to walk back now'. It kind of helps you manage your time.

R: Okay. Anything else, inside of outside of school, that has helped you to make those decisions?

Importance of PRU having prospectuses available to help with DM

J: I think one thing inside school is the fact that [redacted] has loads of brochures on hand. She gave me a [redacted] brochure to look through with my mum, and that really helped, and also she gave me a [redacted] College brochure to look through with my mum and that helped because it meant that I didn't have to go out and get it, it was there for me and all I had to do was look through it.

Research with Mum.

Ease of having Prospectuses at PRU.

R: So there's something about it maybe being a bit easier here, because you've got access to those resources without having to go to the college yourself.

J: Yeah. And this is a tiny bit off topic, but it's the same here with, like, Maths books and Science books. The school actually pays to give you revision books that are then yours and you can write in. And I think that's really good because if I didn't have that I probably wouldn't go and get them because it's something I would think I didn't need, but after having it I realised, 'Damn, this helps me a hell of a lot more'.

Financial support with revision books.

R: So you realised how important it was?

J: But it's really good that the school actually provides you with that.

Financial support with revision books

R: Okay. So another question I wanted to ask was who has been influential to you in making these decisions?

Varies a has been influential

J: I'd say [redacted] probably, and also my mum. Well, my mum in the fact that she does it, so it's influenced what I want to do, and [redacted] because the things that I do and the activities that I enjoy, and working with money, the

Mum has been influential ↳ following in Mum's footsteps.

Supportive parents

more I talked about it with [redacted] the more I figured it fits in with the whole accountancy concept.

Discussions with Vanessa helped guide thinking

R: How much time would you say you've spent with [redacted]? How many times have you met with her?

Frequent check-in by adult

J: Well she always takes us for Drama studies - that's once a week, so she normally spends five, 10 minutes catching up with me, seeing if anything's happened.

Informality of support

R: So, it sounds like, every week you're having a conversation with her?

J: Yeah, a small one, even in the corridor. I'll go up to her if I get any news, and then the next time she sees me, or she'll call me in and she'll talk about 'Oh, how did it go?', or if I have an interview she'll prepare me for it, say 'This is what you need to do, this is what you need to take', etcetera.

R: So it sounds like it's quite ad-hoc and individualised. It sounds like she checks in on you, if you've got an interview she finds out when it is, and then if she knows when it is she can make an appointment with you so that she can help you.

Vanessa helps build confidence for interviews.

J: Yeah, and also, because I know a couple of students who have had appointments and who haven't gone, because they don't really feel confident enough and they haven't told the teachers, but at least when I tell [redacted] she can give me ideas.

R: Okay. So it sounds like something as simple as just telling her...

Just talking to Vanessa helps.

Vanessa being knowledgeable

Vanessa/staff care for you (re next steps)

J: Yeah, it really helps. Also, because obviously not for me, but I know some people can't speak to their parents about it, or their parents don't really have the knowledge of what it is, so it's good to have someone at school who's helping you and if you're feeling bad you know who will care, and cares what you want to do afterwards.

Importance of support at school

R: Right, so there's two things there. Something about [redacted] having the knowledge about what's available for you next, and also having that friendly and caring side and making you feel comfortable with her.

Perception that mainstream = Performance-related

Say is that genuinely caring

J: Yeah. Here it feels a lot more like the caringness and the generosity and niceness feels a lot more genuine here that it does in mainstream school, because teachers at mainstream are really pushy because some of them get paid on what marks you get, and they're paid to be nice, but here, obviously they get paid, but it's their choice, they know the kids they're working with have issues so they're genuinely nice people, and they're not just putting it on as an act.

Perceives PRU staff to be more caring than mainstream staff.

Staff @ PRU are genuinely nice.

Mainstream staff work for money; PRU staff want to work.

R: Okay. So you've said that [redacted] and your mum have been the two main influential people.

J: Yeah.

R: Okay. So, are you aware of any other support that is available to you in school, other than [redacted]?

External careers guidance available

Formed plans for leaving

J: I know there is a careers advice woman, or something like that, but I haven't really looked into it because I haven't felt the need to, because I've already got a plan, so at the moment I'd say that I'm confident about what I want to do but it's still good that I check in regularly with [redacted]

Preference for School-based stuff over external careers guidance.

R: Okay. So, thinking about you, then, what have you done so far this year, to help you thinking about moving on? You've already told me you've been for an interview for work experience, and you're going to start that in January. What other things have you done in preparation for next year?

Belonging / settled → Better mindset for thinking about future.

J: Things I've done... I reckon one of the things that's helped me is finding my place here, because back when I had issues with mental health, and stuff, that really wasn't on my mind, but now that I'm here and I'm settled down I haven't got much on my mind, so it was more there. I didn't really prepare for it, it just one day came along and I was thinking 'Damn I actually need to make a life decision here', and it was a big shock. I'm not really sure what ways I prepared, there wasn't really anything I did, I just went with it.

Yr11 = decision time.

Natural progression/ow to preparing for next steps.

R: Yeah, and I guess you're preparing at the moment by doing the work experience, and that kind of thing. Okay, so how are you thinking next year's going to be different to next year?

Post-16 = more responsibility

Punctual + work hard (post-16)

J: Well, I feel like next year I'm going to have way more responsibility, because obviously if I'm going to get the apprenticeship then I need to be on time every day, I need to work hard and take into account responsibilities and weigh it in comparison to my social life, and get the right mixture between responsibilities and having fun.

Balance btwn fun/ social life and responsibility. (post-16)

R: Okay, because here you have fun quite often, presumably, because you see your friends at break and lunch times, and in lessons as well.

J: Yeah.

R: Okay, anything else?

More structured (post-16)

J: I think next year will be a bit more structured as well, because there's been a lot of moving around for me in the past year, like not wanting to go to school, and just not going to school at all for a while, so I think next year will be a bit more structured and a bit more, 'This is your day-to-day'.

Yr 10 - not in school much.

R: And how are you feeling about that?

Preference for structure

J: I actually find that alright, because I prefer something that's structured, because if something isn't structured then I feel like 'Oh my God, I need to sort this out'. I don't mind changes and stuff, but I don't like to not know what

Preference for routine / structure

I'm doing. I hate not knowing what I'm going to do next or not knowing what's going to happen next because I hate that suspense.

R: Okay, so there's something about structure being quite a good thing next year, because I guess you've got structure to an extent here, but it's more flexible here than it is in mainstream, so you've gone from very structured to less structured, and then you're going to go to more structured again.

J: Yeah.

R: Okay. Is there anything you're worried about, or nervous about, or concerned about?

Takes time to get comfortable / Belonging / settled

Difficult to feel a sense of belonging/ settled when arrived at PRU

J: The only thing I would say I'm nervous about is meeting the new people, because I think it won't be as bad as when I came here, but I still think it's going to take me a little while to get more comfortable because you know when you see someone who's very quiet and you think 'Oh they're rude because they're not speaking to anyone'?, but it's kind of like I don't want to be seen as 'He's rude, he's not speaking to anyone', I think for the first week or two I'll probably just get on with what I need to do and then I'll start spreading out because one thing I need to do is I need to get settled before I meet people.

nervous to meet new people

Nervous that people will interpret his shyness as rudeness.

Importance of feeling settled

R: So is there anything you can do about that? Is there any support you can get for that?

Feels supported at PRU

J: No, but I think the way that I'm treated here is enough support in a way, and also because new people come here sometimes, so I'm meeting new people quite often, and although I'm not 100% comfortable with it, I know I have to get used to it so it's training me a bit more but I don't really think there's any way more I can prepare for it.

opportunities/ experiences to meet new people @ PRU

Experiences at PRU helping YP to feel more comfortable meeting new people.

R: Do you know if it's part of [redacted]s job to come with you after your GCSEs at all?

Vanessa will check-in after transition.

J: She'll probably come and see how I'm getting on, or phone [redacted], because I know they do do that, they still keep in touch with some of the other Year 11s.

R: Okay. Anything else you're nervous about, or is that the main thing?

J: That's the main thing.

R: Okay. So, if everything goes well, where do you see yourself in five years time? What are you doing in five years time?

Positive possible self

High aspirations

J: Well, by five years time I want to be a full-time accountant, or I want to start thinking about becoming freelance; somebody who works for themselves because I'd prefer to be in charge of myself, although I don't mind working for other people. I want to see myself settled down and financially stable. Even if

Desire to work for YP's self.

settled down / importance of feeling settled.

04.12.2015

Avoiding debt/ financial security.

I'm living with my parents, at least pay my way, help them out. I don't just want to sit there and not do anything.

Job = money

R: Okay. So, what if things don't go so well? Have you thought about that much?

Prefers not to dwell on negative thoughts.

J: If things don't go so well, I haven't really thought of it that much because I don't really like to dwell on that sort of thing, but if things don't go well I've kind of got a plan to go back to college or what I was going to do if things don't go so well is I may take a gap year, try and clear my head, maybe go on holiday somewhere, travel for a bit, and then I'll probably go back to college or something and find again what I want to do, because I feel that even if I try to become an accountant and it fails miserably, I prefer that I've tried it because you never know, if I didn't try it I could've been amazing, or I could be really good at it. But, one thing I don't want to do, is I don't want to regret things, because I know that if I don't do certain things I will regret them. Even if I know they're going to go bad I'll probably still regret them.

Back-up plan

Important to try.

Doesn't want to regret anything

R: And also, it sounds like you're being very realistic, you've got your mum there, who's already an accountant, you've also got [redacted]

J: Yeah.

R: Okay, so if we fast-forward a year from now, what's your life going to look like? What's going to be happening?

Realistic expectations

Apprenticeship

Job = money

J: I'd probably be at my apprenticeship and probably still be living at home because I'm not really going to move out that soon. But I want to be stable, I want to pay my way, help paying for the house, help paying for shopping. Even if it's like only a tiny a bit, it may not contribute that much it's still something for me to feel kind of accomplished.

Financial security = accomplished / self-actualisation.

R: Remind me, how does the apprenticeship actually work?

setting up apprenticeship

How apprenticeship works

J: You apply for it and then once you've got an interview and everything and once you've left they take you to a place called [redacted], and that's like a job thing and they help you find a place. So this is when you're starting - if you haven't already found a place they'll help you find a place to work, and then basically you'll go along and if it all goes well you'll get the job and what it is, is you kind of shadow someone, so you'll be seeing how it works, you'll start with very minor things, very easy things, and then it'll get progressively harder. And you're working towards certain goals, and at the end of the apprenticeship the company can either say 'Actually yeah, we want to keep you on board, how would this be full-time', or what they'll do is they'll say 'Oh, sorry, not really what we're looking for', or 'Sorry, we can't really take anyone else on board'.

what happens @ end of apprenticeship.

R: And that's after a year, is it?

J: Yeah, that's after 12 months.

R: And what does the week actually look like?

J: I'm not too sure, but they normally send you to college one day a week. You have to work a minimum of 30 hours and then go to college one day a week.

How apprenticeship works.

R: And that would be teaching you about accountancy?

J: Yeah. And also catching up with how you're doing, etcetera.

R: Okay, so your goal at the moment is to get the accountancy apprenticeship, and hopefully this time next year you'll be doing that accountancy apprenticeship. How likely do you feel it is that you're going to reach that, on a scale of zero to 10; zero being you're not going to reach it and 10 being you're definitely going to get there?

Confidence in getting on apprenticeship

J: I reckon it's around seven, eight, because I think I will get it, but I don't really want to say 10 because I'm going to keep it real and say that there is every possibility that I could not get it, no matter what it is, whether they're full, whether I'm just not what they're looking for. There's always a chance, nothing's ever certain. But if all goes well then hopefully, I will get that, and if not I could always go to do A-Levels.

Realistic expectations

Back-up plan

R: Yeah. So, you know what you want to do when you leave. What is it that you've got to do between now and the end of Year 11 to make sure that it happens?

High expectations/ aspirations

J: Well, we have a Maths mock next week, and obviously I'm aiming for a B in Maths. And also we are doing our foundation GCSE in January, and then we're doing the GCSE again in June, and basically if I get a C in Janaury they'll decide that I'm doing higher, but I could always say 'I don't want to do that, I'll just stick with my C', and that means Maths is out the way. But my teacher said that even if I don't get a C they're still going to put me in for higher because they know I can, they know I'll at least get a C in higher, so I want to get my B, I want to get Science and English I want to get a C and hopefully in Physics I want to get a B because Physics helps with accountancy, so I kind of want to get a B in Physics and Maths, and all the others I don't care as much but what I need to do now is put my head down, and over the Christmas holiday I've said that I'm going to really put my head down and start to think about the things I need to study and catch up on a few things because I don't want it to come a week before the exam and think 'Damn, I need to do this!'.

Exam process

Staff - high expectations

Knowledge of what is needed to progress in future jobs

Realistic

Doesn't care about irrelevant (perceived) subjects @ GCSE.

Needs to 'get head down' to meet goals

R: Yeah. Okay. So you know what grades you want to get.

J: Yeah.

R: So, again, putting that on a scale, how likely do you think it is that you'll get those grades?

Realistic (?) expectations

J: I kind of want to say a six.

R: Okay, so why are you not a four or a five, for example?

J: Because I'm more confident that I will than I won't, but again there's always possibilities of messing up or whatever, but I'm not really someone who's fazed a lot by that. If something happens I kind of learn to deal with it, like I said before I'm a problem-solver, so if there's a problem, nine times out of ten I have a way to solve it or I find out a way to solve it.

Relaxed attitude

Confident that will have a plan, even if exam goals not met.

R: And are there other people who might help you to do that?

Supportive parents/mum

J: Yeah, I know my mum would help, the school would help. Say I had a breakdown in the exam, they'd try to get in touch with the exam board, so the school would really help with that.

Feels supported by PRU

R: Okay. How supported do you feel in making decisions about what to do and where to go from the school?

Feels supported in making decisions (by PRU)

J: I feel very supported.

R: Okay, lets put that on a scale again.

J: I'd say yeah there is stuff they could do more, but considering the resources that they have and that we are quite small, I'd say about an eight, a nine.

R: Okay, that's interesting. Tell me about what you think they could do to make it better, if resources wasn't an issue.

EBI: Start encouraging career planning earlier (yr 10)

J: If resources wasn't an issue I think they should have more people and work with you in Year 10 to know what you want to do, so start the support earlier. But of course, since they do have a lack of resources I kind of understand why, but yeah that would probably help more, but I don't even think [redacted] did that. I reckon, you know what I was saying about how here they put less pressure on you; sometimes I kind of think that's good but I reckon they could be a bit more harsher with the way they speak, but not all the time, just if it's really getting to it they're like 'Oh, come on'.

Perception that mainstream would be no more supportive.

EBI: Balance between enough & too much pressure

Perception of a lack of resources preventing better support

R: Okay, so maybe applying a bit more pressure than they do?

J: Yeah, but not enough pressure to know that someone's going to buckle. If they're going to put pressure on someone they've got to know that the person's actually going to be able to handle it.

Individualised pressure

R: Okay, so why are you not lower on the scale? What do you think they do well?

All staff @ PRU show genuine interest in YP.

J: All the teachers are really interested, they ask 'What have you got here?' and obviously because the teachers all speak to each other, like [redacted] probably told the teachers, 'Oh J[redacted] applied for this, oh J[redacted] went for his

Staff - genuine interest ← interview', so the day after my interview the teachers were asking 'Oh, how did it go? Did it go well?', so it feels more like friends than teachers. ] Positive communication between staff PRU staff - friendly.

R: Okay, so it's that community kind of feel.

J: Yeah.

R: Okay. Is there anything else that you wanted to say that you haven't said already?

J: No, I think I've said it all.

## Appendix 10: List of student participant codes exported from NVivo 10

| Name | Sources | References |
|---|---|---|
| A-Levels | 1 | 1 |
| AP gives you work experience | 1 | 1 |
| AP introduced YP to new career options | 1 | 1 |
| AP is boring | 1 | 1 |
| AP linked to PRU | 1 | 4 |
| AP organised for individualised career choice discussions with people from that career | 1 | 3 |
| AP provided opportunities for career exploration | 1 | 4 |
| Academic skills have decreased since being at the PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Achieved as expected in mocks | 1 | 1 |
| Achieved better than expected in Maths GCSE | 1 | 2 |
| Activities available at PRU | 5 | 11 |
| Activities in AP | 2 | 6 |
| Adult support with decision-making available | 1 | 1 |
| Agency of YP | 3 | 4 |
| Also attends college one day each week | 2 | 4 |
| Anxiety presentation | 3 | 6 |
| Anxiety prevented YP from attending another mainstream school | 1 | 2 |
| Appears defeated | 3 | 4 |
| Applied to college | 4 | 6 |
| Applied to college because unsure what else to do | 1 | 1 |
| Appreciative of options available at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Appreciative of people seeing potential in YP | 1 | 1 |
| Appreciative of support given to her by her friends | 2 | 2 |
| Apprenticeship | 4 | 4 |
| Apprenticeship hours are long | 1 | 4 |
| Apprenticeship salary is too low | 1 | 1 |
| Arrives late | 1 | 2 |
| Asking for extra work | 1 | 2 |
| Asking staff for advice | 2 | 2 |
| Assumption that applying = success | 1 | 1 |
| Attendance has improved | 1 | 1 |
| Attendance has improved since attending PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Attended many different work experiences | 1 | 2 |
| Attending AP because quit a subject | 1 | 1 |
| Attending PRU because needed more support than in mainstream | 1 | 2 |
| Attending PRU has made YP like school again | 1 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Attending PRU to avoid exclusion | 1 | 1 |
| Attending college whilst at PRU has helped prepare YP for attending full-time | 2 | 2 |
| Attending school more would help | 1 | 1 |
| Avoidance of applying for next step | 2 | 2 |
| Avoidance of obtaining mock results | 1 | 1 |
| Avoidance when things are hard | 1 | 1 |
| Avoidant of studying just subjects | 1 | 2 |
| Avoiding debt | 2 | 4 |
| Avoids problems until they disappear | 1 | 1 |
| Aware of subjects YP needs to work on | 1 | 1 |
| Aware of support available at PRU | 1 | 4 |
| Awareness of specific subjects that would help to achieve long-term career goal | 1 | 2 |
| Awareness that achieving the necessary grades might be hard | 1 | 1 |
| Back-up plan | 8 | 26 |
| Being trusted with more responsibility at PRU prepares YP for world of work | 1 | 1 |
| Belonging | 3 | 7 |
| Belonging related to time at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Better mindset for thinking about future since being at PRU | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Big step for YP to make the decision | 1 | 1 |
| Blames PRU staff for lack of progress | 1 | 2 |
| Block work experience | 1 | 1 |
| Break time - pool and spends time with friends | 1 | 1 |
| Break time - talks and hangs around with friends | 1 | 1 |
| Building on strengths | 5 | 13 |
| Calmer environment at PRU helps YP to work better | 2 | 2 |
| Can be separated from friends | 1 | 1 |
| Can feel left out | 1 | 1 |
| Can manage uncomfortable situation if forced | 1 | 1 |
| Cannot be bothered to attend | 1 | 1 |
| Cannot think of anything that has gone well since being at PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Cannot think of anything that has not gone well since being at PRU | 3 | 3 |
| Career advice available at PRU for Year 11s | 1 | 1 |
| Career advice in classes | 1 | 3 |
| Career decisions are hard | 4 | 5 |
| Career decisions are scary | 1 | 1 |
| Career likely to be different to college | 1 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| subject | | |
| Careers guidance advisor and work experience person | 1 | 1 |
| Carpentry - not something he has wanted to do for a long time but has an interest in it | 1 | 1 |
| Challenges of exploring career options with parent | 1 | 1 |
| Choice to do work experience | 1 | 1 |
| Chosen career perceived as a hard profession | 1 | 1 |
| Clear about next steps to get to where YP wants to be (career) | 3 | 4 |
| Clear decisions not made | 3 | 3 |
| Clear long term career goal | 3 | 9 |
| Clear path following PRU | 4 | 8 |
| College | 6 | 8 |
| College = more freedom | 1 | 1 |
| College checking commitment | 1 | 1 |
| College course details | 1 | 1 |
| College course whilst at PRU | 2 | 2 |
| College different to PRU and school - only studying one subject | 1 | 1 |
| College is much larger than PRU | 2 | 5 |
| College staff teach course at one of the PRU sites | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Common room = escape | 1 | 1 |
| Common room = free space | 1 | 1 |
| Community feel at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Competitive field | 1 | 4 |
| Completed application forms independently | 2 | 2 |
| Confidence | 11 | 33 |
| AP not helping with confidence | 1 | 1 |
| Ability to handle large groups of people has been helped by Scouts | 1 | 2 |
| Confidence built by taking an active role in Scouts | 1 | 1 |
| Confidence to attend PRU helped by Scouts | 1 | 1 |
| Attending college helps foster confidence for post-16 | 2 | 2 |
| College staff building confidence in YP | 1 | 3 |
| Confidence in achieving necessary grades | 7 | 13 |
| Confidence in getting apprenticeship | 3 | 5 |
| Confidence in reaching next step | 10 | 22 |
| Confidence with GCSEs | 1 | 1 |
| Confidence with Maths GCSE | 2 | 2 |
| Confidence with reaching long term goal | 5 | 7 |
| Confident that will | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| have a plan, even if exam goals are not met | | |
| Desire to feel confident | 1 | 1 |
| Does not feel confident | 1 | 1 |
| Envious of others' confidence | 1 | 1 |
| Feels confident about college interview | 1 | 2 |
| Friendships foster confidence | 1 | 4 |
| Important to be confident to allow you to make friends | 1 | 1 |
| Mood affects confidence in large groups | 1 | 2 |
| PRU has fostered confidence | 2 | 5 |
| PRU staff building confidence | 4 | 7 |
| Positive mock experience has aided confidence for GCSEs | 2 | 2 |
| Presents as confident but is not | 1 | 1 |
| Staff (VCSW) helps build confidence for interviews | 2 | 4 |
| Unrealistically confident(qstnmk) | 1 | 2 |
| Content with what YP has currently | 1 | 1 |
| Contradition re doesn't want to leave PRU but happy to go to collere | 1 | 1 |
| Could not verbalise why PRU has been supportive in DM | 1 | 1 |
| DM based on reputation of college | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DM process | 2 | 3 |
| DM to not look different to friends | 1 | 1 |
| Date mix-up for organising next steps | 1 | 1 |
| Day-to-day work on work experience | 1 | 5 |
| Decided during transition that YP this would be a long term placement | 1 | 1 |
| Decision made to see if YP enjoys it | 1 | 1 |
| Decision remained constant | 4 | 8 |
| Dependency on one friend | 1 | 1 |
| Desire for a job | 3 | 3 |
| Desire for control | 4 | 11 |
| Desire for extra lessons in own time | 1 | 1 |
| Desire for honesty | 1 | 1 |
| Desire for independence | 1 | 3 |
| Desire to do something different | 1 | 2 |
| Desire to do what makes YP happy | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to go to college | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to have found things sooner | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to have more workshop-based careers guidance | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to have parent at college interview | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to improve current grade | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to leave college | 1 | 3 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| if something goes wrong | | |
| Desire to not be misled | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to overcome anxiety | 1 | 5 |
| Desire to talk to people from different businesses and careers | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to teach | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to think more positively | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to work for self | 1 | 1 |
| Desire to work with children | 1 | 1 |
| Details of apprenticeship | 1 | 1 |
| Determined | 4 | 12 |
| Did not attend interviews | 1 | 1 |
| Did not need help to prepare for college interview | 1 | 1 |
| Did not take advantage of staff support for interview | 2 | 2 |
| Did well in exams | 1 | 1 |
| Did well in mocks | 4 | 5 |
| Didn't attend PRU for some time due to relationship breakdown with peer | 1 | 3 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - PRU is a happier place | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - PRU is better than mainstream | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - PRU is like a family | 1 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - PRU more like a community | 2 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - call teachers by first name at PRU | 2 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - calmer environment at PRU | 4 | 4 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - conflict management is better at PRU | 1 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - consequences | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - different activities and subjects available at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - everyone is more friendly at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - feel closer to teachers at PRU | 1 | 3 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - feels like one-to-one teaching at PRU | 2 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - learn more at PRU | 2 | 4 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - less bitchy at PRU | 2 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - less distractions at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - less people at PRU | 7 | 12 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - less rules at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - mainstream cares more about reputation | 2 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - mainstream strict on uniform and presentation | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - mainstream teachers more likely to label YP | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - more fun at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - no bullying at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - no detentions at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - no homework at PRU | 2 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - no one really argues at the PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - no uniform at PRU | 2 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - not judged at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - not one rule for all at PRU | 1 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - smaller classes at PRU | 5 | 8 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - | 4 | 6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| smaller classes so more efficient at dealing with problems | | |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - students allowed to leave site at lunch time | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - students are more welcoming at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - students at PRU are more understanding of each other | 1 | 2 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - students given more freedom at PRU | 3 | 3 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - teachers at PRU are more relaxed | 3 | 3 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - teachers at PRU don't label YP | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - teachers at PRU forgive and forget | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - teachers at PRU know how to manage the varying needs of the students | 3 | 10 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - teachers have more time for you at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - teachers more fun at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - teachers more understanding at PRU | 3 | 5 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Difference between PRU & mainstream - you can get away with more in a mainstream beecause it's bigger | 1 | 1 |
| Different kind of love for friend | 1 | 1 |
| Difficulty in focusing for lengthy periods of time | 1 | 1 |
| Disadvantage of fewer people in PRU - atmosphere if there's a fall out | 1 | 1 |
| Dislike of PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Dislike of school (general) | 2 | 2 |
| Dislike of starting somewhere new | 1 | 1 |
| Disliked secondary mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Dislikes of lessons | 1 | 1 |
| Distinguishing between family and friends by how they care for YP | 1 | 3 |
| Distrcted easily in mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Does not engage in sports much | 1 | 1 |
| Does not get individual support from main teachers | 1 | 1 |
| Does not want to commit to working sundays | 1 | 1 |
| Does not want to go back to mainstream | 1 | 1 |
| Doesn't care about perceived irrelevant subjects | 1 | 1 |
| Doesn't feel she has had any good experiences | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Doesn't feel supported in DM | 2 | 2 |
| Doesn't get on with Social Worker | 2 | 2 |
| Doesn't get on with most girls at PRU | 1 | 3 |
| Doesn't mind completing an exam in preferred subject | 1 | 1 |
| Doing something that equals qualifications | 1 | 1 |
| Doing the same course as friend(s) | 1 | 1 |
| Doing well at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Doing well, generally, at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Drawing on previous experience | 1 | 1 |
| EBI - YP enjoyed the PRU more | 1 | 1 |
| EBI - if all students were happy with the support | 1 | 1 |
| EBI - staff had knowledge of field | 1 | 1 |
| EBI - start encouraging career thinking earlier (Yr 10) | 1 | 1 |
| Easy to go back to original decision | 1 | 2 |
| Embarrassed in front of college students | 1 | 1 |
| Encouraged to seek support from school | 1 | 1 |
| Encouragement by PRU to complete own research | 1 | 1 |
| Enjoyable aspects of work experience | 1 | 6 |
| Enjoyment of AP | 1 | 5 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Enjoyment of hobby | 1 | 1 |
| Enjoyment of leaving site at lunch time | 1 | 1 |
| Enjoyment of subject | 3 | 5 |
| Enjoyment of work experience | 1 | 3 |
| Enjoys attending PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Enjoys coming to the PRU to hang out with friends | 1 | 1 |
| Enjoys horse riding | 1 | 1 |
| Enjoys lessons at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Erratic decision-making process | 3 | 3 |
| Exam process | 1 | 1 |
| Excited about meeting new people | 1 | 1 |
| Excited about prospect of having a good job in future | 1 | 1 |
| Excited about prospect of meeting new people (as well as nervous) | 1 | 1 |
| Excited about uniform | 1 | 1 |
| Excited by idea of work experience role | 1 | 3 |
| Excited to finish GCSEs | 1 | 1 |
| Excited to learn more about career | 1 | 1 |
| Excited to see what college is like | 1 | 1 |
| Excluded a number of times before attending PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Excluded from school | 1 | 2 |
| Expectation of lateness despite short journey to college | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Expected to know either way by this time | 1 | 1 |
| Expecting to attend PRU until end of Year 11 | 5 | 8 |
| Expecting to be around more people than at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Expecting to get the part-time job | 1 | 1 |
| Experiences at PRU helping YP to feel more comfortable meeting new people | 2 | 2 |
| Exploring decisions with parents | 1 | 1 |
| External careers advice | 4 | 10 |
| External careers advice - specific to desire | 1 | 2 |
| External careers advice encouraged YP to have a back-up | 1 | 3 |
| External careers advice helpful | 2 | 3 |
| External careers advice more formal | 1 | 1 |
| External careers advice not timely (qstnmrk) | 2 | 2 |
| External careers advice unhelpful | 2 | 3 |
| External careers advisor met 1to1 | 1 | 1 |
| External careers advisor provided prospectuses | 1 | 1 |
| External careers guidance available at PRU | 3 | 4 |
| External locus of control (negative) | 1 | 2 |
| Extra support available for core subjects | 2 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Family influential in DM | 6 | 10 |
| Favourite subject - art | 2 | 2 |
| Fed up with Maths | 1 | 1 |
| Feeling comfortable to ask questions in classes at PRU | 1 | 2 |
| Feeling of being judged by others at PRU | 1 | 9 |
| Feeling that PRU aren't understanding YP's needs | 1 | 1 |
| Feeling that PRU has increased in pupil intake | 1 | 5 |
| Feeling that class sizes have increased | 1 | 1 |
| Feeling that new YP should be welcomed | 1 | 1 |
| Feeling that opportunity lost | 1 | 1 |
| Feels PRU could be doing more to support YP | 1 | 1 |
| Feels able to be self at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Feels can speak to PRU teachers about anything | 1 | 1 |
| Feels comfortable at PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Feels has worked hard to reach next step | 1 | 1 |
| Feels judged by new people | 1 | 2 |
| Feels more able to be honest with PRU staff | 2 | 2 |
| Feels she can't say no in AP | 1 | 2 |
| Feels she has been incorrectly labelled by AP | 1 | 3 |
| Feels she has performed better in exams at PRU than she would have in mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Feels supported at PRU | 4 | 6 |
| Feels supported by PRU | 5 | 9 |
| Feels supported by PRU in making decisions | 12 | 18 |
| Feels that interview support will be necessary | 1 | 1 |
| Feels that mainstream school didn't care about YP being bullied or mental health | 1 | 1 |
| Feels that school only took bullying and mental health seriously when proof from doctor was provided | 1 | 1 |
| Feels that the PRU doesn't prioritise her | 1 | 1 |
| Feels won't get good grades due to not being taught by main teachers | 1 | 2 |
| Felt judged by mainstream teachers | 1 | 1 |
| Felt rushed to make a decision | 1 | 1 |
| Finalising decision is hard | 2 | 4 |
| Financial security | 1 | 2 |
| Financial security = accomplished , self-actualisation | 1 | 1 |
| Financial support from PRU for resources | 2 | 3 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Finds work at PRU easy | 1 | 1 |
| First day at college will be scary | 2 | 3 |
| Flexibility to drop a subject | 1 | 1 |
| Flexible environment at PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Focus on a core subject | 1 | 3 |
| Focus on own responsibility for decision | 1 | 1 |
| Following in footsteps of a family member | 4 | 5 |
| Fond of PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Fondness of VCSW | 1 | 1 |
| Forced to drop a subject due to lack of staffing | 1 | 1 |
| Formed plans for leaving PRU | 6 | 12 |
| Found break times difficult | 1 | 2 |
| Found organisation challenging in mainstream | 1 | 2 |
| Found the PCP activity challenging | 1 | 1 |
| Frequent informal check-in by staff re next steps | 4 | 5 |
| Friendly approach with deadlines at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Friendly approach with decision-making at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Friends are influential in decision-making | 6 | 12 |
| Friends at PRU are very supportive | 3 | 3 |

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|---|---|---|
| Friendships allow you to trust someone | 1 | 3 |
| Friendships made at PRU - benefits to emotional wellbeing | 1 | 1 |
| Frustrating when people don't understand YP's emotions | 1 | 1 |
| Future hopes - professional footballer | 1 | 1 |
| Generally things have been good | 6 | 6 |
| Get to try it out first, see what it's like helped to make decision | 1 | 1 |
| Good attendance necessary for college | 1 | 1 |
| Good exam results at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Good teachers at PRU | 1 | 3 |
| Gratitude for support with application | 2 | 2 |
| Gratitude with support received at PRU | 1 | 2 |
| Growing up is scary | 2 | 3 |
| Had not heard of a PRU before | 1 | 1 |
| Happy at PRU | 8 | 10 |
| Happy with decision | 2 | 2 |
| Hard knowing you're behind others in process | 1 | 2 |
| Hard to trust people | 1 | 1 |
| Has an idea of what to do after leaving PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Has not felt supported by PRU in DM | 1 | 1 |
| Has not taken | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|
| advantage of support with DM | | |
| Has not thought about transition | 2 | 2 |
| Has now made a decision about next steps | 1 | 1 |
| Hates previous mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Helen has helped with DM | 2 | 5 |
| Helpful environment at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Hi expectation for self | 1 | 4 |
| High aspirations for self | 9 | 16 |
| High hopes for results | 3 | 4 |
| History of poor attendance | 1 | 1 |
| Hobbies | 3 | 10 |
| Home-school communication is important at PRU | 1 | 2 |
| Honesty about difficultie | 1 | 1 |
| How apprenticeship works | 1 | 2 |
| Ideas about long term career goal | 1 | 1 |
| Ideas of what to do when leaving PRU | 6 | 11 |
| Identity at AP | 1 | 5 |
| If best friend isn't in, YP sits alone | 1 | 1 |
| Imagining different options | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of adult knowing YP very well | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of being | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|
| given space when needed | | |
| Importance of being honest with careers guidance officer | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of choice | 2 | 8 |
| Importance of experiential career guidance | 1 | 2 |
| Importance of exploring career options with parent | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of external career guidance | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of family | 1 | 2 |
| Importance of family over friends | 2 | 3 |
| Importance of feeling settled | 3 | 4 |
| Importance of feeling supported | 3 | 3 |
| Importance of friendships to talk to them | 1 | 5 |
| Importance of job stability | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of language | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of making an informed decision | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of staff knowing YP well | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of sticking with decision once post-16 option has begun | 1 | 1 |
| Importance of support at PRU, school | 2 | 2 |
| Importance of working hard in the future | 1 | 2 |
| Important for YP to be | 1 | 1 |

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| liked by others | | |
| Important for YP to have people around him who understand what he goes through | 1 | 3 |
| Important to try | 2 | 2 |
| Improve PRU by longer breaks and trusted to leave site | 1 | 1 |
| Improved grades at PRU | 4 | 7 |
| Independence | 6 | 15 |
| Individual support at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Individualised teaching | 1 | 3 |
| Informality of conversation about future | 3 | 6 |
| Informality of support | 4 | 9 |
| Initial interview to ensure YP made right choice for them | 1 | 2 |
| Initially thought that teaching would be less work | 1 | 1 |
| Inspirational teachers at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Inspired by mother | 1 | 2 |
| Inspired by teachers (not PRU) | 1 | 1 |
| Intends to revise more nearer to exam time to reach goal | 1 | 1 |
| Internal locus of control (negative) | 1 | 2 |
| Interview for apprenticeship went well | 1 | 2 |
| Interviewed before attending PRU | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|
| Job = money | 4 | 7 |
| Keeps in contact with friends from mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Knowledge of how to reach goal | 2 | 3 |
| Knowledge of what grades are needed | 10 | 13 |
| Lack of career discussion in classes | 2 | 2 |
| Lack of support in PRU re DM | 1 | 1 |
| Learnt a lot on work experience | 1 | 2 |
| Leaving PRU is scary | 1 | 1 |
| Length of time at PRU = feeling of having some control | 1 | 1 |
| Less of a need to be independent at PRU | 2 | 2 |
| Less people at PRU = more support available re next steps | 1 | 1 |
| Less people at PRU has helped YP | 1 | 1 |
| Less stressed at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Lifestyle change | 1 | 1 |
| Likely to quit during course | 1 | 1 |
| Likes attending the PRU | 4 | 4 |
| Long-term placement | 4 | 7 |
| Looking forward to a new start | 1 | 1 |
| Looking forward to being more independent at college | 2 | 4 |
| Looking forward to finding out more about career next year | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|
| Looking forward to focusing on one subject post-16 | 1 | 1 |
| Looking forward to having clarification of career choice | 1 | 1 |
| Looking forward to next steps | 2 | 3 |
| Looks up to teachers | 1 | 4 |
| Love for mother and brother | 1 | 1 |
| Low expectations of self | 2 | 9 |
| Made decision independently | 2 | 2 |
| Made friends at PRU | 10 | 14 |
| Made same decision as friends | 1 | 1 |
| Made to stick to subject decision | 1 | 1 |
| Main source of support outside PRU | 1 | 6 |
| Mainstream feels PRU is more appropriate for YP | 2 | 3 |
| Mainstream report cards cause teachers to label YP | 1 | 1 |
| Mainstream school rude to YP | 1 | 2 |
| Mainstream treat YP like a child | 1 | 1 |
| Mainstream, PRU allocation not YP's choice | 2 | 3 |
| Majority of revision in class | 1 | 1 |
| Making a stepped plan | 2 | 2 |
| Making decision was easy | 3 | 3 |
| Making decisions has been hard | 2 | 2 |
| Many YP not getting on | 1 | 3 |
| Many different types of people attending PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Many options for the future | 2 | 2 |
| Many students at PRU argue and fight | 2 | 2 |
| May as well continue with something that YP has already started | 1 | 1 |
| May go to university | 1 | 1 |
| May have performed ok in mocks | 2 | 2 |
| May retake maths to improve next year | 1 | 1 |
| May seek further help re interview from VCSW or Helen | 1 | 1 |
| Might go traveling | 1 | 1 |
| Milestonew | 1 | 1 |
| Misses being with more people | 1 | 1 |
| Misses friends from mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Misunderstanding | 1 | 1 |
| Mixed feelings about leaving PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Mocks crept up quickly | 1 | 1 |
| More people at college | 5 | 5 |
| Motivation | 1 | 1 |
| Building on personal motivations | 5 | 12 |
| De-motivated by university debt | 2 | 6 |

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| Demotivated by A-Levels | 1 | 1 |
| Level of motivation different from one day to the next | 1 | 1 |
| Mood affects motivation | 1 | 2 |
| Motivated by interest in subject area | 2 | 3 |
| Motivated by money | 7 | 15 |
| Motivated by other people's perspectives of YP's strengths | 1 | 2 |
| Motivated to be independent | 4 | 7 |
| Motivated to improve grades | 3 | 3 |
| Motivated to make decisions if friends have made some | 2 | 2 |
| Motivating by proving ability to family | 1 | 3 |
| Positive mock experience has motivated YP to reach goal | 1 | 1 |
| Staff motivating student | 1 | 1 |
| Mutual support with partner | 1 | 1 |
| Nan taken on father role | 1 | 1 |
| Natural progression to preparing for next steps | 1 | 1 |
| Need to be punctual and work hard, post-16 | 1 | 1 |
| Need to leave site, get fresh air to relieve stress | 2 | 3 |
| Need to succeed in relevant subject at GCSE to meet goal | 1 | 1 |
| Need to take it more seriously to ensure YP gets necessary grades | 1 | 1 |
| Needs to be a relaxed, informed decision to avoid making a wrong choice | 1 | 1 |
| Needs to be pushed into doing something | 1 | 1 |
| Needs to work hard to reach goals | 8 | 12 |
| Negative experience of work experience | 1 | 1 |
| Negative judgments affecting DM | 1 | 3 |
| Negative outsider perspective of PRU education | 1 | 3 |
| Negative possible self | 1 | 1 |
| Negative relationship with teacher | 2 | 5 |
| Negative thinking | 1 | 1 |
| Negatives of apprenticeship | 1 | 2 |
| New option for post-16 | 1 | 1 |
| No clear career in mind | 2 | 5 |
| No communication with VCSW | 1 | 1 |
| No experience of external careers guidance | 2 | 3 |
| No further support needed | 2 | 2 |
| No need to be organised at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| No plans for future | 2 | 2 |
| No preference between | 1 | 1 |

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| PRU and mainstream | | |
| No serious back-up plan | 3 | 3 |
| No siblings | 1 | 1 |
| No study for mocks | 1 | 1 |
| Not able to find out choice until late in year is anxiety provoking | 1 | 1 |
| Not enjoying AP | 1 | 3 |
| Not following instructions at mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Not looking forward to getting up early | 1 | 1 |
| Not organised plans for next year yet | 1 | 2 |
| Not seeking support for interview | 1 | 1 |
| Not sure what could make PRU better | 1 | 1 |
| Not worried about moving on | 6 | 7 |
| Nothing looking forward to about next year | 1 | 1 |
| Nothing would make DM support better at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Number of GCSEs taking | 3 | 3 |
| Office work seen as boring | 1 | 1 |
| Often does not arrive at PRU until later | 1 | 1 |
| Opportunities and experiences to meet new people at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Opportunity to miss a lesson to focus on career | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|
| Option to meet with staff (VCSW) any time | 2 | 3 |
| Organisation | 1 | 1 |
| Others' perceptions affecting DM | 1 | 4 |
| Overcoming self-doubt | 1 | 3 |
| PCP - would prefer to get up early and work hard than not have a job | 1 | 2 |
| PRU a friendly place | 1 | 1 |
| PRU allow YP to leave early to gain experience working at a primary school | 1 | 1 |
| PRU allowing time to settle in | 1 | 1 |
| PRU and YP collaboration | 9 | 17 |
| Staff (VCSW) completing application form together | 6 | 9 |
| PRU being sensitive to anxiety | 1 | 3 |
| PRU being small can be negative | 1 | 1 |
| PRU doesn't make YP aware of all options and what they can be | 1 | 1 |
| PRU encourages YP to make choices for themselves | 1 | 1 |
| PRU going downhill because too many YP | 1 | 1 |
| PRU has been tolerant | 1 | 1 |
| PRU has fostered ambition | 1 | 1 |
| PRU has had a positive impact on life | 1 | 2 |
| PRU has made it possible for YP to | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|
| have a social life again despite suffering with social anxiety and depression | | |
| PRU have given YP advice about next steps | 1 | 1 |
| PRU have helped guide DM | 1 | 1 |
| PRU having access to prospectuses and resources | 2 | 4 |
| PRU helping YP with exploration | 2 | 3 |
| PRU is a familiar environment | 1 | 1 |
| PRU is like a school but smaller | 2 | 2 |
| PRU is restrictive | 1 | 2 |
| PRU linked to college | 3 | 5 |
| PRU not as bad as initially expected | 1 | 1 |
| PRU offers help | 1 | 1 |
| PRU placement intended to be a break from mainstream | 1 | 2 |
| PRU provide a clear plan to get necessary grades | 1 | 1 |
| PRU provided new opportunity for strong friendships | 1 | 1 |
| PRU staff (VCSW) supporting networking | 1 | 1 |
| PRU staff are proactive re next steps | 1 | 1 |
| PRU staff change work expectations based on YP's emotions | 1 | 1 |
| PRU staff genuinely caring | 4 | 8 |
| PRU staff pointing out strengths | 2 | 5 |
| PRU students can go to university | 1 | 2 |
| PRU teachers approachable | 2 | 4 |
| PRU was a fresh start for YP | 1 | 1 |
| Parent - influential in making decisions | 7 | 12 |
| Parent attended PRU | 1 | 2 |
| Parent attended college interview | 1 | 2 |
| Parent did drugs when she was younger | 1 | 1 |
| Parent had a negative PRU experience in the past | 1 | 1 |
| Parent ran away when she was YP's age | 1 | 1 |
| Parent supported YP leaving mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Parent very busy | 1 | 1 |
| Parent was beaten as a child | 1 | 1 |
| Parents have encouraged career thinking | 2 | 2 |
| Parents hopeful that PRU will help YP with decisions | 1 | 1 |
| Parents initially unhappy with child being at PRU but now happy | 2 | 2 |
| Parents separated | 1 | 1 |
| Part time job | 4 | 8 |
| Partner did not want YP to become a teacher | 1 | 1 |

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| People come and go at the PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Perceived closeness to teachers at PRU | 1 | 3 |
| Perceived control within PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Perceived current performance at PRU | 1 | 2 |
| Perceived freedom at PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Perceived lack of choice | 1 | 2 |
| Perceived lack of support from PRU | 2 | 2 |
| Perception of a lack of resources preventing better support | 1 | 1 |
| Perception of more independence at college | 2 | 2 |
| Perception of poor mock performance | 1 | 1 |
| Perception of subject being less important | 1 | 1 |
| Perception of unfairly treated for work experience because was not being paid | 1 | 1 |
| Perception of uniform | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that PRU are supportive until there's a problem | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that PRU hasn't wanted to help YP | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that PRU staff are less knowledgeable about YP's potential | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that PRU staff are more caring than mainstream staff | 2 | 3 |

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|---|---|---|
| Perception that PRU students don't go to university | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that YP has been forced to take a subject | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that YP is more worried than peers | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that YP is the only one who has not been supported at PRU with DM | 1 | 2 |
| Perception that YP is unorganised | 1 | 2 |
| Perception that apprenticeship will be easier than PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that attending the AP each week is not helpful | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that career will open up many doors | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that college interview does not need to be prepared for | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that college is strict | 3 | 3 |
| Perception that college students are there to focus on their life | 1 | 2 |
| Perception that college students will be more mature | 1 | 2 |
| Perception that finding the PRU sooner would have made YP happier | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that mainstream staff = performance related pay, so care not genuine | 1 | 2 |
| Perception that many people don't have a career in what they | 1 | 1 |

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| studied as a young person | | |
| Perception that meeting VCSW is the only thing that needs to happen | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that organising post-16 apprenticeship is simple | 1 | 3 |
| Perception that receiving support will make it more complicated | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that staff blame YP's poor attendance for lack of progress | 1 | 2 |
| Perception that staff care less about YP who don't try hard | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that teachers are knowledgeable | 3 | 4 |
| Perception that teaching involves a lot of sitting and writing | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that teaching is a lot of work | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that teaching is boring | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that to receive support from PRU re DM, YP must know what they want to do | 1 | 1 |
| Perception that university is not right for the YP | 1 | 1 |
| Performed better than expected (self) in mocks | 2 | 2 |
| Permanent exclusion | 1 | 1 |
| Plans for next step have changed back to original plan | 1 | 7 |
| Plans for next steps have changed | 4 | 11 |
| Plays football | 1 | 1 |
| Poor behaviour in mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| Positive communication between staff | 2 | 2 |
| Positive experience of external careers guidance | 1 | 1 |
| Positive possible self | 3 | 6 |
| Positive relationship with staff | 3 | 3 |
| Positive relationship with staff helps with decision-making | 2 | 2 |
| Positives of apprenticeship | 1 | 3 |
| Positives of apprenticeship - money, learning, happiness | 2 | 2 |
| Positives of attending PRU | 2 | 5 |
| Positives of attending college | 1 | 2 |
| Post-16 = independent | 2 | 3 |
| Post-16 = more responsibility | 3 | 3 |
| Post-16 = more structured | 1 | 2 |
| Post-16 = new beginning | 1 | 1 |
| Post-16 = treated like an adult | 1 | 1 |
| Potential modes of travel | 1 | 1 |
| Preference for PRU | 9 | 18 |

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|---|---|---|
| Preference for PRU-based staff over external careers guidance | 1 | 1 |
| Preference for a specific staff member at PRU to be supported by | 1 | 1 |
| Preference for one option over another | 2 | 4 |
| Preference for physical activity over academia | 1 | 1 |
| Preference for routine | 1 | 1 |
| Preference for structure | 1 | 2 |
| Preference not to dwell on negative thoughts re career | 1 | 2 |
| Preference to talk to adult in AP about options | 1 | 2 |
| Prefers a shorter lunch break - less chance to lose interest in learning | 1 | 1 |
| Prefers being at the PRU than being at home | 2 | 2 |
| Preparing for next year by working | 3 | 5 |
| Pride in work | 1 | 1 |
| Privilege to leave site at lunch time in Yr 11 | 2 | 2 |
| Process of PRU review meetings | 1 | 1 |
| Process of finding a part-time job | 1 | 1 |
| Professionals already in the field influential in DM | 1 | 1 |
| Prospect of a job after apprenticeship | 1 | 1 |
| Proud I happy for | 1 | 2 |
| having a social life again despite suffering from social anxiety and depression | | |
| Proud of self for attending PRU despite being tired | 1 | 1 |
| Proximity | 7 | 10 |
| Larger proximity from home = out of comfort zone | 1 | 1 |
| Proximity helped with decision-making | 3 | 5 |
| Settling for choice because of proximity | 1 | 1 |
| Putting fears and anxiety into perspective | 1 | 4 |
| Putting self down | 1 | 1 |
| Qualifications for career already obtained | 1 | 1 |
| Questioned whether it was weird that she considers her mother to be her favourite relative | 1 | 2 |
| Questioning ability to make friends | 1 | 1 |
| Quit a subject due to dislike | 1 | 1 |
| Quit part-time job | 1 | 1 |
| Quit work experience to focus on academia | 1 | 1 |
| Ready for the transition to post-16 (mentally) | 1 | 1 |
| Realisation that apprenticeships are linked to colleges | 1 | 2 |
| Realisation that will be leaving PRU soon | 1 | 1 |
| Realistic | 4 | 6 |

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|---|---|---|
| Realistic and straightforward parents | 1 | 2 |
| Realistic expectations | 4 | 13 |
| Reality of sticking to decision is hard | 1 | 2 |
| Reason for attending PRU | 5 | 13 |
| Reason for exclusion - fighting | 1 | 1 |
| Reasons for choosing specific work experience | 1 | 1 |
| Reasons for possible career choice | 1 | 1 |
| Reasons not to join the army | 1 | 1 |
| Receiving the support needed at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Recognition of the hard work carried out by teachers | 1 | 1 |
| Regrets | 1 | 2 |
| Reintegration tried | 1 | 1 |
| Relating transition to positive previous experience | 1 | 1 |
| Relative subject strength helped make decision | 1 | 1 |
| Relaxed attitude | 1 | 2 |
| Relevant work experience for career choice | 1 | 2 |
| Relied on support at PRU re careers more as the year has progressed | 1 | 1 |
| Request hasn't resulted in what YP expected | 1 | 1 |
| Requested change of teachers | 1 | 2 |

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| Respect for ambition in her friend | 1 | 1 |
| Responsibilities (outside school) | 2 | 8 |
| Revision sessions in own time | 1 | 2 |
| SEMH need influencing DM | 1 | 3 |
| Scared at prospect of university | 1 | 1 |
| Scared of committing to a career that's wrong for the YP | 1 | 1 |
| Scary because won't know anyone in college | 1 | 1 |
| Scouts has helped with decision-making | 1 | 1 |
| Seeing familiar people at college helped to feel less anxious about next steps | 1 | 1 |
| Self-actualisation | 1 | 1 |
| Self-awareness | 6 | 14 |
| Self-doubt | 2 | 3 |
| Sense of achievement | 1 | 1 |
| Sense of being misled by HT | 1 | 1 |
| Sense of pride in positive experience | 1 | 3 |
| Sense of progress | 1 | 1 |
| Sense of urgency about making a final decision | 1 | 1 |
| Setting up apprenticeship | 1 | 1 |
| Settled | 3 | 7 |
| Siblings | 1 | 1 |
| Significance of the building | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|
| Small class = individualised teaching based on career choice | 1 | 1 |
| Social anxiety | 2 | 4 |
| Social media | 1 | 1 |
| Some YP assert their control | 1 | 2 |
| Some YP mess about at the PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Some YP take the PRU for granted | 1 | 1 |
| Some consistency with future plans | 1 | 1 |
| Space to talk it through helpful in making decisiont | 2 | 4 |
| Staff (Helen) helped with application process | 1 | 1 |
| Staff (VCSW) aware of process | 5 | 7 |
| Staff (VCSW) helped YP to write a CV | 1 | 2 |
| Staff (VCSW) helps YP to see positives of apprenticeship | 1 | 1 |
| Staff (VCSW) physically takes the YP to college | 2 | 2 |
| Staff (VCSW) prompting career thinking | 4 | 11 |
| Staff able to find relevant work experience | 1 | 1 |
| Staff are friendly at PRU | 3 | 6 |
| Staff at PRU - high expectations of YP | 1 | 1 |
| Staff at PRU care for you (re next steps) | 1 | 1 |
| Staff at PRU unaware of specific career | 1 | 1 |
| Staff encourage YP to use their strengths | 1 | 4 |
| Staff encouragement to overcome fears | 1 | 1 |
| Staff less understanding in mainstream | 2 | 2 |
| Staff support is timely | 1 | 2 |
| Staff willing to do anything to support YP | 1 | 1 |
| Started a new course at beginning of Year 11 | 1 | 1 |
| Staying in class more would help YP achieve necessary grades | 1 | 1 |
| Sticking to same decision has been hard | 1 | 1 |
| Sticking to same decision has been positive | 1 | 1 |
| Still not aware of all options available for post-16 | 1 | 1 |
| Still some uncertainty about entry requirements | 1 | 1 |
| Strike a balance between fun, social life and responsibility, post-16 | 1 | 1 |
| Student choice to stay at PRU | 3 | 6 |
| Students and staff being open with underlying reasons why people behave in certain ways fostering understanding within students | 1 | 1 |
| Subject chosen for post-16 for no reason | 1 | 1 |
| Subjects available at | 6 | 9 |

| PRU | | |
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| Successful at interview | 2 | 3 |
| Successful work experience | 2 | 3 |
| Support available at PRU to help with DM | 1 | 2 |
| Support for anxiety | 1 | 2 |
| Support from VCSW specifically helping to make decisions | 8 | 14 |
| Support from non-family means a lot | 1 | 1 |
| Support from staff (VCSW) to obtain college placement | 3 | 3 |
| Support received at PRU is enough | 1 | 1 |
| Supported by YP's friend's father | 1 | 6 |
| Supported re careers by teachers | 1 | 1 |
| Supporting by explaining things that are not understood | 1 | 1 |
| Supportive family | 3 | 4 |
| Supportive parents | 12 | 33 |
| Supportive partner | 2 | 3 |
| Supportive teachers | 6 | 14 |
| Supportive teachers encourage | 1 | 1 |
| Takes time to become comfortable | 1 | 1 |
| Talk about post-16 = VCSW | 4 | 5 |
| Talked to staff (VCSW) about available options | 3 | 5 |
| Teacher at college helped with DM | 1 | 2 |

| Teachers are influential | 3 | 7 |
|---|---|---|
| Teachers at PRU strike a balance between fun and work | 1 | 1 |
| Teachers have low expectations | 1 | 1 |
| Teachers more relaxed in college | 1 | 1 |
| Teachers provide reassurance | 1 | 1 |
| Teaching self skills for future | 1 | 1 |
| Teaching staff - more vocational | 1 | 1 |
| The PRU is more than just a school | 1 | 1 |
| Thinks did well in GCSE | 1 | 1 |
| This is the YP's first big decision | 1 | 1 |
| This process may have helped (qstnmrk) | 1 | 1 |
| Time at PRU | 7 | 8 |
| Tired in mornings | 1 | 1 |
| Transfering of support received from psychologist challenging | 1 | 1 |
| Treated as individuals - different rules depending on needs | 1 | 1 |
| Treated like an adult in college | 1 | 1 |
| Trusted with more responsibility at PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Trying to apply is the most challenging part of decision-making | 1 | 1 |
| Two paths available to reach long-term goal | 1 | 2 |

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| Typical dat at PRU | 7 | 7 |
| Unaware of how more people will affect YP | 1 | 1 |
| Unaware of what would help | 1 | 1 |
| Uncertain if correct choice made | 1 | 1 |
| Uncertainty about what to do after KS4 | 3 | 4 |
| Undecided about choice of two post-16 pathways | 1 | 5 |
| Unexpected decision made | 1 | 1 |
| Unfairly treated in part time job | 1 | 4 |
| Unhappy with decision | 1 | 2 |
| University in future | 2 | 4 |
| Unrealistically positive possible self (qstnmrk) | 1 | 2 |
| Unstable home life | 1 | 1 |
| Unsuccessful reintegration | 1 | 2 |
| Unsure how YP feels about decision made | 1 | 1 |
| Unsure how to make decision | 1 | 1 |
| Unsure of feelings about this being final year at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Unsure of grades needed | 2 | 2 |
| Unsure of how to ensure YP gets necessary grades | 1 | 2 |
| Unsure of long term career goal | 1 | 1 |
| Unsure of performance in Maths GCSE (took early) | 1 | 1 |
| Unsure of what to do post-16 | 1 | 3 |
| Unsure which college course to do | 2 | 3 |
| Upset that YP can't be supported by parent in the way they desire | 1 | 1 |
| Used to dislike going to mainstream school but now enjoys attending PRU | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW - influential in making decisions | 6 | 7 |
| VCSW has many roles | 1 | 2 |
| VCSW helping with back-up plan | 2 | 2 |
| VCSW is main source of careers guidance | 3 | 4 |
| VCSW is someone to talk to when things aren't going well | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW will check in after transition | 1 | 1 |
| Waiting list to attend PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Wants an enjoyable job | 1 | 1 |
| Wants to be looked up to by others | 1 | 1 |
| Wants to do well | 1 | 1 |
| Wasn't happy because of an incident with another pupil at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Ways in which the PRU has supported YP | 1 | 1 |
| Weighing up pros and cons of different options | 2 | 2 |
| What happens at end of apprenticeship | 1 | 1 |
| What would improve | 1 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| PRU | | |
| Wide curriculum offer | 1 | 1 |
| Will attend college open evening | 1 | 1 |
| Will be ok once in the room | 1 | 1 |
| Will complete 9 or 10 GCSEs | 1 | 1 |
| Will go to college after PRU | 2 | 3 |
| Will miss PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Will miss the staff (VCSW) | 1 | 1 |
| Will need to make a decision before trials | 1 | 1 |
| Will not know until late in academic year if successful in trials | 1 | 2 |
| Work experience allowed opportunities for daily choices | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience has kept YP motivated with chosen career path | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience helped YP to know the aspects of future role that they do not like | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience interview prompted career thinking | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience led to a job | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience made YP feel more grown up | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience provided experience of independence | 1 | 4 |
| Work experience selection process | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience to get information about role, jobs | 3 | 5 |
| Work experience to try out roles | 2 | 2 |
| Work experience was interesting | 1 | 2 |
| Work harder to achieve necessary grades | 1 | 1 |
| Working harder at school to ensure goals reached | 4 | 8 |
| Worries | 2 | 2 |
| Academic performance is a worry | 1 | 3 |
| Anxious around new people | 3 | 3 |
| Anxious talking about starting college | 1 | 5 |
| Nervous about going to college | 1 | 2 |
| Nervous about growing up | 1 | 2 |
| Nervous about meeting new people | 5 | 10 |
| Nervous that people might interpret his shyness as rudeness | 2 | 3 |
| Nervous to move on because doesn't know anyone | 1 | 1 |
| The worrying thoughts are worse than the reality | 2 | 3 |
| Transition won't be easy | 4 | 6 |
| Anxious about transition | 2 | 2 |
| Worried I anxious about leaving PRU | 1 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Worried about achieving goals | 1 | 1 |
| Worried about college being further from home than PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Worried about college interview | 2 | 3 |
| Worried about college teachers | 1 | 2 |
| Worried about doing something embarrassing | 1 | 2 |
| Worried about getting lost in college | 1 | 5 |
| Worried about having to manage own problems | 1 | 1 |
| Worried about not knowing anyone at college | 1 | 1 |
| Worried about not making friends in college | 1 | 1 |
| Worried about specific exam | 1 | 1 |
| Worried about workload in college | 2 | 3 |
| Worried that low grades will force YP into an undesirable job | 1 | 2 |
| Worried that no one would like him at PRU | 1 | 1 |
| YP doesn't want to leave PRU | 7 | 11 |
| worried about everything | 1 | 2 |
| Would like to be a mechanic in the future | 1 | 1 |
| Would like to do several things after leaving PRU | 1 | 1 |
| Would like to have a stable job now | 1 | 1 |
| Would like to have attended the PRU sooner in educational career | 1 | 3 |
| Would like work at PRU to be more challenging | 1 | 1 |
| Would prefer to do an apprenticeship | 1 | 1 |
| Would rather go back to mainstream | 1 | 1 |
| YP asking for homework | 2 | 2 |
| YP at PRU have varying needs | 1 | 2 |
| YP at PRU having a negative impact on others | 1 | 1 |
| YP aware of support needed | 1 | 1 |
| YP been taken out of many lessons due to relationship breakdown between YP and teachers | 1 | 2 |
| YP being proactive to support next steps | 1 | 1 |
| YP can be rude to protect herself | 1 | 2 |
| YP can't remember how easy or hard it was to make the decision | 1 | 1 |
| YP choice to leave mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| YP did not mind being moved to PRU | 1 | 1 |
| YP does not have a father | 1 | 1 |
| YP does not miss anything about mainstream | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| YP doesn't mind going somewhere different to friends | 1 | 2 |
| YP doesn't want to follow in parent's footsteps | 1 | 1 |
| YP doesn't want to regret anything | 1 | 1 |
| YP doing career research | 3 | 3 |
| YP feeling understood | 1 | 1 |
| YP feels comfortable asking for support from VCSW | 1 | 1 |
| YP feels he needs to be more committed to fitness | 1 | 1 |
| YP feels she cannot be herslef at AP | 1 | 4 |
| YP feels that PRU has neglected her | 1 | 3 |
| YP feels that PRU have not helped her to make decisions | 1 | 2 |
| YP feels that PRU's advice has been forced upon them | 1 | 1 |
| YP feels that staff at PRU don't know about how to progress in the relevant area | 1 | 2 |
| YP feels that support with DM is not needed | 1 | 1 |
| YP has learnt more at PRU that in mainstream | 1 | 1 |
| YP hopes they know someone at college | 1 | 1 |
| YP lives with her mother | 1 | 1 |
| YP needs time to think about next steps | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| YP out of school for a long period of time | 1 | 1 |
| YP supports others | 1 | 3 |
| YP takes pride in work now | 1 | 1 |
| YP thinks she would have performed worse in exams in mainstream school | 1 | 1 |
| YP uncertain of process to reach goal | 4 | 9 |
| YP was given option to reintegrate into mainstream but chose not to | 1 | 2 |
| YP was removed from parent when younger | 1 | 1 |
| YP will need support from PRU | 1 | 2 |
| YP works better in smaller classes | 1 | 1 |
| YP yet to have a meeting with VCSW | 1 | 1 |
| YP's disaffection with education | 2 | 5 |
| YP's friend's father influential | 1 | 2 |
| Yr 10 - not in school much | 1 | 1 |
| Yr 11 = do more work | 1 | 1 |
| Yr11 = decision time | 2 | 3 |
| external careers guidance uses scales | 1 | 1 |
| homework isn't forced at PRU | 2 | 4 |
| life changing decisions | 1 | 1 |
| pressure | 1 | 1 |
| Avoidance of putting self under pressure | 4 | 4 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| DM following negative pressure | 1 | 1 |
| Decision made under pressure has changed | 1 | 1 |
| Does not respond well to pressure | 1 | 1 |
| EBI - balance between enough and too much pressure | 1 | 2 |
| Feeling pressured | 3 | 8 |
| Felt pressured by PRU to make a decision | 1 | 2 |
| Frequent informal check-in by adult seen as positive pressure | 2 | 2 |
| Increased sense of pressure in mainstream | 1 | 1 |
| Individualised pressure | 1 | 1 |
| Link between language used and sense of pressure | 1 | 1 |
| Made a decision under pressure | 2 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Parental pressure | 3 | 4 |
| Perception that teachers apply less pressure at college | 1 | 1 |
| Pressure applied if friends have made decisions | 2 | 3 |
| Reduced pressure after GCSEs completed | 1 | 1 |
| Reduced sense of pressure at PRU | 3 | 7 |
| Requesting homework because no pressure | 1 | 3 |
| Social Worker applying pressure | 2 | 2 |
| Supportive teachers reduces pressure | 2 | 2 |
| school subject enjoyed | 2 | 6 |
| uncertainty about how post-16 will look | 1 | 2 |

## Appendix 11: List of adult participant codes exported from NVivo 10

| Name | Sources | References |
|---|---|---|
| Ability to change minds after receiving results | 2 | 3 |
| All YP have an initial session with VCSW to think about post-16 options | 1 | 1 |
| Apprenticeships are an option | 1 | 1 |
| Being positive with YP helps them to make decisions | 1 | 1 |
| Challenges of supporting DM | 1 | 1 |
| Challenge of building confidence | 2 | 3 |
| Challenge of getting parents involved | 1 | 1 |
| Challenge of getting the YP to commit to a decision | 1 | 1 |
| YP's anxieties being a challenge | 1 | 1 |
| Colleges are an option | 1 | 1 |
| Encourage YP to think about post-16 upon arrival | 1 | 1 |
| External careers advice unhelpful | 2 | 2 |
| External adults don't know the YP well enough to advise | 2 | 4 |
| No external careers advisor | 1 | 1 |
| YP don't feel comfortable speaking to strangers | 1 | 1 |
| Helen Youth Worker also helps with decision making | 1 | 2 |
| How well PRU supports YP to make post-16 decisions | 2 | 3 |
| Importance of YP experiencing another setting | 2 | 2 |
| Importance of good communication between adults at PRU re decisions made | 1 | 1 |
| Individualised curriculum based on YP | 3 | 4 |
| Individualised process | 1 | 1 |
| PRU provides experience of making and sticking to decisions | 1 | 1 |
| Post-16 focus in lessons | 1 | 1 |
| Post-16 on PRU agenda every half term | 2 | 4 |
| Role of the EP | 2 | 6 |
| School sixth forms are an option | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Steps to Employment is an option | 3 | 9 |
| Support available after transition | 2 | 3 |
| Traineeships are an option | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW role | 1 | 2 |
| Differences between careers advisor and VCSW | 1 | 1 |
| PRU checks in after transition | 2 | 8 |
| Regular informal conversations for those who struggle with DM | 1 | 4 |
| Role of VCSW | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW aware of process | 1 | 5 |
| VCSW can attend interview with YP | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW ensures that she is kept updated re decisions made | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW finding out YP's strengths and interests | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW helping | 1 | 8 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| YP to be more confident | | |
| VCSW helping YP to have realistic expectations | 1 | 3 |
| VCSW helping YP with back-up plan | 1 | 2 |
| VCSW helps YP complete application forms | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW helps get YP ready to leave PRU | 1 | 1 |
| VCSW keeps an list of who has applied where | 2 | 2 |
| VCSW knows the YP well | 1 | 5 |
| VCSW suggesting career ideas | 1 | 1 |
| Work experience | 3 | 9 |
| YP fear of failure so avoiding DM | 1 | 2 |
| YP have a say in whether they stay at PRU or not | 1 | 2 |